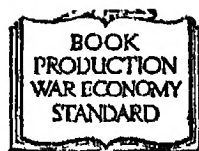


THE WOMAN IN THE PICTURE

by
JOHN AUGUST



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CHAPTER ONE

IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS THE NEWSPAPER PHOTOGRAPHER, THOUGH perhaps a family man and a good citizen, was not a person of importance. Certainly he did not command the awe of reporters and editors who had to suffer his temperament, tolerate his dreamy forgetfulness, correct his dumb mistakes, and wait resignedly for him to produce the pictures which, they said in city-rooms, were never by any chance the ones he had been sent out to get. In those days he was an enthusiast or a fanatic or even a gad-fly, but he bore himself with an occasional trace of humility, and men still alive can remember when he spoke respectfully to his victims. But the picture magazines have changed all that. The news photographer is now a greatly bored young man who creates the fashions adopted by college boys, knows the unlisted telephone numbers of movie stars and financiers, heads the free list of the most arrogant night-clubs, accepts the homage of debutantes and war correspondents, and creates eminence or ignominy with the pressure of a shutter-release. He is Ward McAllister and Richard Harding Davis in one skin, he may be the head tenor of the Met in the same skin, and possibly a slight touch of Al Capone as well. And if he is on the staff of *Spectacle* the Press agents who give him gold cigarette-cases are careful to have a crest engraved on them.

Usually, however, even *Spectacle's* royal family must wait for great events to happen—cannot, even in night-clubs, create great events and stage history to order. But when a superb young man from *Spectacle*, with two assistants and a taxi which he hired by the day, arrived at the machine-shop of Jim Gislason in the village of Petit Marais, Wisconsin, he was, in all innocence, dropping a lighted match in a petrol-tank and setting in motion a sequence of events considerably more important than his magazine. For ten days he had been part of a team which had been working on one of *Spectacle's* big projects, which was to be called 'Wisconsin at War'. He painfully missed the restaurants of Fifty-second Street, and his colleagues had been permitted to return to them while he lingered in this wilderness for another day merely to gratify the whim of a project editor by photographing a one-horse factory.

He finished the job late in the afternoon, the taxi bore him back to Fond du Lac, and in due time he resumed his elegance on Fifty-second Street. His innocence remained untarnished. He did not know that his day in Petit Marais had thrown a switch, closed the gaps in a pattern, begun the solution of a mystery, initiated flight and pursuit and gunfire, and condemned certain men to death—but it had. In due time that visit would make itself felt in the United States Senate. It would produce a resignation from O.W.I. It would affect a conspiracy against the peace and safety of the United States. It would prove an

embarrassment for a group of extremely powerful men who could ill afford to be embarrassed. It would prove an opportunity for another group of men, who greatly needed an opportunity. It would give the second of these groups a weapon against the first group which would enable them to precipitate a final conflict. . . . But for the photographer it was merely an extra day in a country town where no one was sufficiently sophisticated to understand the hardship it put upon him.

* * * * *

Jim Gislason, the proprietor of the machine-shop, felt a little short of reverencing the photographer, and perhaps was not fully in awe of *Spectacle*. His employees had a gorgeous time looking absorbed and holding work to machines at angles which would make fine photographs unless you knew how to run the machines. There would be some advertising in it and the employees would have some pictures of themselves to frame—if *Spectacle* ever used any—so he let them kid themselves with the notion they were Hollywood material. Besides, he could not have got any work out of them anyway.

Jim did not say a word when, after saying good-bye, the photographer had an afterthought. He stopped to point his camera at the big elm where some of the employees tossed horseshoes during the noon hour. Jim knew that there was a device on the lens which enabled him to take pictures at a right angle. Clearly Marie Royce did not know it. She stood in the office door and watched tranquilly while the camera was supposed to be recording that big elm but was really making shots of her.

And why not? Jim had seen Marie refuse to pose at her desk for the photographer and frustrate several attempts to sneak up on her. She had been in the group when he posed all twenty-two women employees round a lathe, but she had kept half hidden behind Mrs. Belle Stanger, who was at least three feet wide. Now the doorway made an excellent frame for her, the photographer was exercising first-rate pictorial sense, and Jim approved. Marie had been blueprinted by a sound designer and the machine-work was superb. If the American public was going to look at the Gislason Machine-Shop, Marie was its star exhibit. In fact, it was a shame that Mason's Mill Pond had not warmed up yet, so that the photographer could show contented employees relaxing after the daily war effort—and Marie in a bathing-suit. In the competent judgment of Jim Gislason, Marie in a bathing-suit would build circulation for any magazine.

The photographer closed his camera, shook hands with Jim and Marie again, repeated his smooth thanks, joined his companions, and drove away. Jim bellowed at a crowded window, "Get started makin' up man-hours, you ham stars! DeMille is gone. Do something to fool me into thinkin' you earn your pay."

He put an easy arm round Marie's shoulders—repeated experiments had informed him that she would permit so much and no more—and

drew her into the office. She sat at her desk and wrinkled her nose at a pile of work sheets whose figures she had been transferring to government blanks.

"Let 'em go, babe," Jim said. "Nobody checks 'em. They just weigh them."

"Still, Washington wires Madison about them, Madison 'phones us, and I have to say something. . . . Will *Spectacle* publish our faces, Jim?"

"Naw. They take a thousand for every onc they print. That bird just wanted another day on an expense account. Why should they run pictures of a one-horse gadget mill?"

Marie smiled a little. "But you're the national talent for improvisation, Jim. You've doubled your floor space, tripled your working force, and quadrupled your output. You'll be the ingenious Yankee gadgeteer. Fifty-seven employees making nineteen different articles for Wisconsin war industry. You're a natural."

"Yeah. Old Yankee name of Gislason. Fifty-seven employees, includin' forty cripples, fifty feeble-minds, and anyways fifty-five geniuses who it's cheating the companies to insure. How's for you and me to go into town and get us a beer?"

"You get back into the shop and sweat some labour. Make up those man-hours and show a profit. I've got to tell Washington all about it in quadruplicate." Marie picked up a pen and added thoughtfully: "I like privacy. I hope they never publish them."

"They won't, babe," he said. He went into the shop and began to roar, automatically becoming the driving boss. But he kept thinking about Marie. She hadn't liked it when *Spectacle* arranged to take those pictures. She hadn't liked it when they were being taken and she wasn't liking it now. Several times he poked his head through the office door to look at her. At her desk she was quiet and absorbed—too quiet, maybe. Jim Gislason acknowledged that he didn't know much about women, but Marie was looking the way she had looked two years ago when she came from the N.Y.A. camp at Waupun and took a job running a lathe. She had at once proved herself a good worker and soon shown signs of becoming what she was now, the unofficial straw-boss of the place. But it had taken her a long time to lose a mysterious quality of—well, suspicion. Like now. She looked—waiting, maybe? Or scared, maybe?

Hell, that didn't make sense! What was there for a gal to be scared of in Petit Marais? Probably it was just that the photographer had made a pass at her. Jim grinned, for, if so, he knew the answer. In two years he hadn't been able to get to first base. He thought, with complete confidence, that there was lots of time, plenty of time.

At five o'clock the confused noise of lathes, drill presses, planers, and a dozen other kinds of machines—most of them third-hand or older—stopped with a sudden sharp silence. A moment later there was laughter and yelling, down the centre aisle. The Rudolsky half-wit was taking off her clothes again. "Anna!" Jim yelled. And,

more loudly: "Marie! Come a-hellin'. Here goes that strip act again."

Marie appeared in the office door, took in the situation, laughed, hurried towards Anna Rudolsky, seized a big fat shoulder, and shook it hard. "No, Anna!" she explained. "Not here. We change our clothes in the girls' locker-room."

"Is big enough for five," Anna screamed. "Is got fifteen in it this minute." She kicked her overalls away and stood, a hundred and seventy pounds of her, in red rayon pants the size of a beach umbrella, pink brassière, and grimy shoes.

"Bat her over the head with a wrench!" Jim shouted. But Marie scooped up the overalls, grabbed the handbag which hung on Anna's lathe, seized Anna by the nape of the neck, and hustled her down the aisle. She banged the wash-room door shut on her and called through it, "You get the grease out of your hair, Anna, or I'll personally spank you."

Gramp Potter straightened up from his drill press, peered over his glasses at Marie, and said, "Heard they can use a bouncer up at Swenson's cocktail-bar, daughter."

"Thanks, babe," Jim said. "I'll keep this foundry moral——"

"She's absolutely right, Jim," Marie said. "That wash-room isn't fit for a sow—not a genuinely self-respecting sow. You've simply got to fix up something decent. You could wall off——"

"Wall off the First Methodist Episcopal Church's parson's hand-painted, four-hole backhouse!" he yelled. "If I had forty square feet of space I'd buy that old piano-box lathe that Pete Halverson's got in his cellar. We could turn out them valve lifts that Felipe wants. You want I should put in glass-tile showers and a powder-room for a covey of gigglin', gossipin', time-beatin' wenches that cheat me whole-sale——"

Marie laughed at him. "You like to think you're a proletarian, Jim, but you're the most grasping capitalist I ever saw. If you'd give your slaves a decent place to wash in, they would make more money for you."

Swede Nelson stopped to lean on his hand-truck and leer companionably at Marie. "Yeah, you ought to build us up some morale, Jim. Trouble is, your floor show's no damn' good. I got it—have Marie come out at five o'clock and start taking off her clothes——"

"So it was a stag movie at the Moose Hall last Saturday," Marie said thoughtfully. "I'll bet you told Polly Slater it was a boxing bill. Well, I'll tell her."

The audience laughed, and Jim saw appreciation in the eyes that watched Marie walk back to the office. She was worth watching. She kept her head high, and the motion of her hips and knees was as precise as any machine on the floor, and those curves had been turned to a tolerance of a thousandth of an inch. *Spectacle* ought to have made movies—and in colour.

She was preoccupied in the battered light truck when he drove her

and a half-dozen of the employees back to Petit Marais. She was still disliking the idea of *Spectacle*. Impulsively, she said to Swede Nelson, "Take me to a movie in Fond du Lac tonight."

"It stinks," Jim said.

"Have to give you a rain check, sweetheart," Swede said. "I got more damn' women to satisfy—Polly, she said she wants to go over tonight."

"It's a swell bill," Jim said. "I'll take you, Marie."

"Okay, Jim. Seven-thirty."

She smiled at him. Certainly it was okay. *Spectacle* was giving him a chance to make a little time with her.

* * * * *

It was the middle of May 1942 when *Spectacle's* photographer paid his visit to Petit Marais. Six weeks later, in early July, a newspaper dispatch produced activity in various places—particularly in New York City. The dispatch was from Denver, Colorado. It said that Senator Tom Fetterman had been taken off the train which was carrying him to the Western state that he represented. He had been taken to a hospital, was suffering from a cerebral hæmorrhage, and would not live. Tom Fetterman, the plough-horse of the West, the last of the silver tongues, the war hawk, the enemy of isolationism, was going to die. The old man lay in a Denver hospital and doubtless thought blackly of the situation which his death would produce. Two years ago his utmost had not been enough to prevent his state from electing a governor whom he called a copperhead. Now Governor Custer, the copperhead, would have the power to appoint a Senator to complete old Tom's unexpired term. Custer was known to speak for the compromisers, the negotiators, the defeatists, and those who understood that there were more dangerous enemies of America at home than Hitler or the Japs could ever be. Tom Fetterman had said bluntly that Custer stood also for even fouler birds. Now if the Governor supported those who had supported him, treason would get a voice on the floor of the United States Senate.

A ripple ran through the American Press, as a few columnists saw the opportunity which Senator Fetterman—and certain others—had foreseen. A discreet concern was expressed in London, Moscow, and Chungking. A renegade American who broadcasted on short wave from Berlin made a mocking prophecy and offered himself for the Senate seat that would soon be vacant. What, if anything, the United States Government thought we are not given to know. But with the greatest possible secrecy certain private citizens began to act. In groups—in two groups.

In New York the most private of all citizens, a man named Taylor Damon, undertook to reach a man named Eugene Penfield by long-distance telephone. Mr. Damon usually took extreme care to do nothing himself—to do everything through others whose connection with him could not be publicly established. Mr. Damon's job was to

think—to think far ahead of everyone else, to think so clearly and accurately that his associates could not make mistakes when they came to act on his thoughts. He would not entrust this telephone call even to a secretary.

Locating Eugene Penfield in Chicago, Taylor Damon said, "Get back to Silvertip." Silvertip was a vast estate of the Penfield family in the Sierra Nevada. "Get back there at once—fly back," Damon directed. "Don't make any speeches, Don't let anyone interview you. You haven't heard that Fetterman is sick. If anyone tells you he is, you haven't got any thoughts about him. You haven't got any thoughts about anything. Public service has exhausted you and you're going to take a rest. . . ."

That was in the early afternoon of the day on which the newspapers reported Tom Fetterman's illness. Taylor Damon had to know everything, but he did not know that, late that night, three men were talking in the apartment of Morris Stein, high above Park Avenue. The youngest of them, Scott Warner, said with a gloom so intense that it was almost satisfaction, "First way station on the route to the Presidency. The minute the old man dies, Damon will have Governor Custer appoint Penfield Senator."

Up till noon today Scott Warner had worked in the Washington office of O.W.I. He had seen the story at noon. He had resigned his job at once, promising to come back in a day or two and clear his desk. He had taken a plane out of Washington even before Morris Stein's wire, summoning him, had arrived. He did not know what they could do. He did know that he could not work for the government while trying to do it.

Irv Barney, the political reporter with the drowsy eyes and the stiff leg, nodded at Scott Warner's statement and said, "Yeah." Morris Stein was old and looked fragile and exhausted. He said, "Remember, Penfield is not domiciled in Fetterman's state. He lives in California."

"Yeah, Silvertip," Irv Barney said. "That's just one of half a dozen Penfield houses. Name any Western state and the Penfield tribe owns at least one county in it. Damon can domicile Penfield wherever he wants him domiciled."

Summer rain was splashing Stein's windows behind the black-out curtains. The room was quiet, high above the city, remote from war and politics—but tonight it was tense with surprise and with the knowledge that they were not ready and ought to be. Stein had devoted a lifetime and fortune to combating anti-Semitism. Then as the war came on he had turned to fighting the domestic enemies of his country. He had spent much money, had turned the light on many dark doings, and had drawn into association with him a number of resolute people. One of them was Irv Barney, the political expert of the *New York Globe*, whose habitual appearance was one of languid despair and who had an inside knowledge of every pressure group in the country. Another was Scott Warner, who in books and magazines, on the public platform, and in less-visible ways, had assailed organiza-

tions, interests, and movements in which he saw the seeds of an American fascism. In particular he had attacked Taylor Damon, who was the brain of American fascism, and Eugene Penfield, who, Stein's group had decided, was the beautiful symbol that Damon was preparing for use at the right moment.

"Right here is where a lot of Damon's most delicate work cashes in," Scott Warner said. "He's betting that he can make a Peace movement by '44. Enough people will be tired enough of the war, taxed enough, and scared enough of the future to demand a negotiated peace. He has kept Penfield from making a single mistake that would embarrass a Peace by Negotiation. He's kept Penfield's record water-tight and spotless. Look at Sumter—when he was in the House he voted for a couple of armament bills. Cross off Sumter, he can't be a Peace candidate with those votes on the record. Corse?—his newspapers used to hate the Japs till Hitler made them yellow Nordics. Anyone who doesn't understand that the administration drove the Japs to make war on us can't be a Peace President. Hancock?—years ago he came back from Europe and said that the Nazis had killed a Jew or two. That rubs out Hancock. But Penfield has had both hands on the wave of the future all along—he's never made a single mistake."

They knew all that. The Penfield position had been exquisitely developed since 1939 or before. By 1941 he had become Penfield the Crusader, telling amphitheatres packed with Bundists that the hope of the world hung on keeping America out of war. By 1944, it had been intended all along, there would be Penfield for President, who would bring back hope to the world by carrying America out of the war—the candidate who would unite all the frightened, the war-weary, the defeatists, the Negro haters, the anti-British, the New Deal haters, the disloyal, the treasonous, and the bribed. In 1941 the Preserver of Peace, in 1944 the Restorer of the American Way. . . . They had counted on two years in which to impair the image that Damon had created. Now, in July of 1942, the certainty that Penfield would be Senator made it likely that they would have no time at all.

Taylor Damon had created that image out of a handsome and stupid man who happened to be a national hero. You could not, Stein's group understood, successfully attack Damon. Innumerable attempts had been made; all had failed. Damon out-thought everyone. Damon got there first. Damon was too intelligent, too fast, too subtle. Men he used as tools had been discredited. Enterprises of his had been exposed and stopped. Agents of his, of both low and high degree, had been sent to federal penitentiaries. But Taylor Damon was invulnerable.

Stein's group had decided, however, that Damon's Man on Horseback was not invulnerable. They had spent many months, much money, enormous energy and ingenuity, working out a plan to stop Damon on the theory that you could stop him through Eugene Penfield. For twenty years Penfield had lived in the headlines of the world. No

man can live in headlines for so long without getting some that can be stored up for use against him. They intended to use headlines to stop, defeat, and perhaps destroy Penfield. But their plan needed more work, more information, and especially more time. They had counted on two years. The dispatch from Denver had wiped out the entire margin.

Realization of that fact was heavy in Stein's apartment. "Wish we'd led holier lives," Irv Barney said. "I'd say the strongest weapon we got left is prayer."

Scott said, "If you use it, pray that old Tom will die slow. If we're going to try to do anything, we need time most of all."

Stein said gently, "Are we going to stop before we start?"

Scott said, "No," and Irv said, "Uli-uh, we got a pair of deuces, maybe we can draw three aces to them." No doubt that was very resolute. But at midnight it was also very forlorn.

. . . Gene Penfield, the All-American football player, had become the international polo player. The polo player had become the aviator, the explorer, the adventurer, the runner of risks in the last wildernesses left on earth. The climber of Everest, the swimmer of the Hellespont, the drifter in little boats, the endurer of thirst, the dicer with death. Tiring of jungles and sports, the hero had turned to deadlier risks. So Taylor Damon had taken him and turned him into a Nordic hero. Had made him the leader who would save America from the Jews and the British and the mongrel races and the international bankers. Who would give America a Nordic hope and a Nordic future and a Nordic discipline. Who would make sure that America rode the wave of the future in the right company.

Damon had formed Penfield into that image. But once—perhaps twice—the image had been endangered. A world which was used to finding Gene Penfield and his wistful, boyish smile in its headlines woke to headlines on April 15, 1939, which reported that at Silvertip, Penfield's mountain lodge, Penfield's oldest friend had killed himself. That was Dixon Gale, who had shared his career, whom, only a year or so before, Penfield had flown, wounded, out of the jungles of the Amazon. His suicide used up as much newsprint as the Russian trials or the Reichstag fire. In the end, Penfield came out even more a knight in shining armour. But all over the world there had been an ugly if brief doubt which had threatened Damon's creation. Why had the hero's friend killed himself? Was it possible that something had been suppressed? Had Penfield, perhaps, killed his friend to save himself? Or, perhaps, to save his wife's honour? Had the hero's wife, perhaps, had to kill his friend to defend herself? Was the hero nobly permitting her to hide in the suspicion that gathered round him? No one knew, but millions wondered.

The hero and his boyish smile and his tousled hair—and Damon's transcontinental network and preparations—had survived those headlines. Six months later he had survived the equally tremendous headlines that told the world about the disappearance and death of his wife.

That too had been a serious danger triumphantly survived. The boyish smile now had the wistfulness of grief as well as youth.

Stein's group were betting that what publicity had created, publicity could destroy. Eventually Damon would turn Penfield into a candidate, as editorial voices at Damon's command were tirelessly suggesting. Then they would revive the old publicity and make a fire round treason's candidate so hot that his master would have to abandon him.

That was their simple plan, now prematurely set in motion by Senator Fetterman's apoplexy. The first step would take Scott Warner to California and Nevada, to open up the old stories and revive the old suspicions. The second step would be Irv Barney, as a political expert, labouring to make the personal scandal a political scandal.

Now that it had to be acted on, the plan looked feebler than it had seemed during hundreds of hours of talking. No weapon was forbidden Taylor Damon—lies, bribery, every kind of pressure, the underworld, blackmail, slugging, murder. Whereas those who tried to fight him had only newsprint. Scott Warner felt hollow and saw hollowness in Irv Barney's face. "It used to look pretty, now it just looks simple-minded," Irv said. "What have we got? We got a murder mystery and that's all. How you going to stop a Presidential bee with a murder mystery, thinker?"

"Make a stink," Scott said, with considerably more confidence than he felt. "If it ever was a good idea, it's still a good idea."

"Lots of sound ways of getting rid of skunks," Irv drawled, "but no skunk yet was ever inconvenienced by a smell. I'd feel happier if we had some good, old-fashioned, soundly American plan like a frame-up."

"Sure. He wants to purify America through suffering—I'd enjoy purifying him a little. There's another sound, old-fashioned plan—assassination."

Irv guffawed. "Son, you're just one of them dirty names, you're a Liberal. You write books full of stern, severe thoughts—you don't know the rudiments of assassination. I'd take a bet you never fired a gun."

"I've seen a lot of movies."

"Yeah. But Damon's boys, they curse and swear and spit. Maybe you'll hear some guns going off sometime and find it's no damn' movie."

Scott said slowly, "Morris wouldn't approve if we started shooting first. But if shooting starts it's the last shot that counts. I'll try to be on hand."

Irv studied him speculatively. "You're a hell of a damn' fool, Scott. If I didn't know you I'd read your books and say, sure, that's wonderful, it's plumb full of noble thoughts. But there's something about you. I don't know what it is—maybe I just like blondes. But I think you're just fool enough to be on hand."

"I wouldn't need to frame Penfield, I wouldn't need to know how you shoot guns, if I could find his wife."

Irv said, "She's dead," in disgust. Morris Stein smiled indulgently and said, "She's dead."

"She was never even sick!" Scott said furiously. "She figured out a sneak and made it good."

"So you said at least a couple of times," Irv said, half asleep. "You never told us—not so's it made sense—why she took a sneak."

"Terror. Blind panic. She was scared."

"We've heard that one too. You never said what she was scared of."

"When I find her, I'll find that out. And," Scott said quietly, "when I find that out, we'll know how to purify Gene Penfield so he'll stay purified."

Patiently, they let him talk—probably because it had cost thousands of Stein's dollars already to indulge his ideas about Marta Penfield. Then they went back to the details they knew by heart. The sky was greying at the windows when the younger men stood up.

"Don't hesitate to spend money," Stein said at the door. "Better communicate only with Irv. Good luck!"

In the doubtful dawn on Park Avenue, Irv Barney said, "Well, we got openers, not deuces—a pair of jacks." He brayed. "A newspaper wise guy and the young thinker—what a pair! I got a game leg and I'm wind-broken. You have noble thoughts, you get migraines, you lose your head easy. Well, I'll start gassin' up the freest and loudest Press in all the world. You get West, son, and spill some beans."

But eighteen hours later Scott Warner was back in Stein's apartment, flourishing photographs and shouting, "Who said openers? We've got all the case. Nothing can stop us now. We're in."

At the very beginning they had had a stroke of luck as blinding as a lightning flash. There was no way of knowing that it was all the luck they were going to get for a long while.

For, back at Washington to close up his job, Scott found on his desk proof-sheets of an issue of *Spectacle* which had been submitted for final okay. It was to be called 'Wisconsin at War', and the whole state was here—forests, farms, dairies, grain elevators, wharves, ship-yards, ore-boats, tank factories, 'plane factories. One page of photographs was called 'Village War Plant' and undertook to show a machine-shop which produced parts for nearby factories. In one photograph Scott saw a profile and something less than half the body of a woman, who was standing behind other women decoratively grouped round a lathe.

The proof-sheet dropped from his hand. There was no possibility that he could be mistaken. He had memorized hundreds of photographs made when the Press of the world was circling the death of Dixon Gale in Gene Penfield's mountain lodge. He had memorized other hundreds made six months later, when the Press of the world was circling the death of Gene Penfield's wife. She had been photo-

graphed almost as often as her husband, oftener than any other American woman. Scott Warner had studied her photographs for many months. When he saw a photograph of Marta Penfield he knew it was a photograph of Marta Penfield.

So he had been right! Against the derision of his partners, against the findings of police and F.B.I. and detective agencies, against the verdict of the Press and the belief of hundreds of millions who had followed the mystery—he had been right. Marta Penfield was not dead. She had not wandered off, delirious or insane, from Dr. Frederick Whittlemore's sanatorium in an oasis in the Nevada desert, to die in that ghastly waste or the ghastlier mountains beyond it. She was not dead—she was at the machine-shop of one Jim Gislason, in a village called Petit Marais, Wisconsin.

Or she had been there six weeks ago. She and the answers to innumerable questions were at Petit Marais. So was the solution to the mystery. So was the one infallible weapon against Gene Penfield, and therefore against Taylor Damon.

The next morning, in New York, it took less than five minutes to get from a badly scared photographer a half-dozen snapshots of this working woman which the make-up editor had not used. If he had needed further evidence, these would have sufficed. He spread them before Stein and Barney. Stein nodded, a man who saw facts instantly and had lost all capacity for surprise. A gleam showed in Irv's eyes for a moment, while the best-filled memory in New York checked this fact against innumerable other ones and a good newspaperman realized that here was the biggest non-military story in the world.

"Well," Irv said, "she's been seen as often as Charley Ross, but I guess we're looking at her. This the reward of faithful industry, son, or just genius?"

"Genius unalloyed," Scott said, and told the simple story.

"It changes things," Stein said, and Scott exploded.

"Changes! It makes them over. All we had was a prayer. A chance to make a noise. Now we've got a mystery solved and a hand that can't be beat. We can't lose."

Irv's scrawny face showed. "That's nice to know. When's *Spectacle* coming out?"

"Three weeks from yesterday."

"Gives us twenty days." Irv looked positively grief-stricken.

"Because, genius, plenty others will see it too."

"They'll see the profile, not the close-ups. I took the negatives and all the prints." He handed the envelope to Irv. "There's a chance, of course. If I can recognize a profile, others may."

"The hero. The hero's boss, Big Brain Damon. The gal's family. All her friends. Every private dick that ever hoped to get a reward. The F.B.I. A hundred and fifty million circulation, net paid. Ever hear what ruined the newspaper business? It was pictures for the constant reader to look at."

"Pictures are *Spectacle's* job. They've published scores of Marta

Penfield and nobody in the organization recognized these. Sure, there are a hundred and fifty million chances it will be recognized. I'll give big odds it won't be."

"I'll take a dime's worth. You better buy a four-leaf clover. Yeah, get an asking price on rabbit's feet, too. So now what?"

"I'm going to Wisconsin," Scott said. He looked at Stein, who nodded and said, "Hold everything while you investigate this."

Irv was professionally disenchanted. That kind were useful to have on your side since they fought all the better for believing there was no chance to win, but they could be annoying. "Ever wonder what a dog would do if it caught the car it started out to chase? Ever hear about the boy who asked Santa Claus for a live volcano and got one? All these years you been yearnin' to find the lost heroine, I couldn't help wondering what you'd do with her if you ever found her."

Scott would not acknowledge a small echo of that same doubt. "Make her talk," he said.

Irv loosed a derisive chuckle. "Was that word 'make'? What you goin' to make her talk about, son? You don't know what happened that night at Silvertip. You don't know a solitary damn' thing about this frail. Well,"—he glanced at the prints—"it's easy to know about them hips, and drop in at the Powers agency and you'll see plenty girls who'd pay high for the profile. But maybe she ain't the kind you 'make' do anything. Or maybe she's crazy as all hell. Or maybe someone told her it's horse sense not to talk."

Scott exploded. "We know now she was scared enough—or mad enough—to disappear. And bright enough to do it when it couldn't possibly be done."

"Maybe she's scared enough or mad enough not to talk. Maybe she read somewhere that amnesia comes in handy when a gun goes root-a-toot."

"Sure. And I've got all four aces in my hand. She won her game for more than two years. Now she loses it the minute I pick up a 'phone. She'll talk."

Irv cackled again. "Go out with Dr. Gallup and ask, 'Who shot Dixon Gale?' Plenty will speak right up and say, 'That brunette with the shape, his pal's wife.' Maybe she's still packin' that gun on the hip that don't show here."

"I've got to see her before I can know anything. The point is, now we can find out who killed Gale—if he was killed. We can find out why——"

"Just ask, huh?" Irv's disbelief wheezed gently on. "Maybe she's even a nice gal. Maybe you got to try to break a home body that gives to the poor and spends her spare time sewin' for orphans with the ladies of the Parish Guild——"

"With her eyes open, she married Gene Penfield. She lived with him more than four years. That tells us all we need to know about her." Scott's voice grew shrill. "She may be a saint, she may be a

nun, she may be the sweetheart of Sigma Chi. What of it? She gives us the chance we never dared believe we'd get. It's the only chance we'll ever have. Is your nerve beginning to leak out at the seams?"

"No, I'm only pointin' out," Irv said disconsolately. "Nothing works out the way you thought, ever. We're pretty bright—and how bright are we? Maybe you'll scare her into talkin'. Maybe she's a sucker for an honest face. Maybe you'll win her heart and we'll lick the dirty names with truc love. Sure, you can just make it up as you go along. But you won't be makin' it up in Wisconsin as Scott Warner, the boy idealist. You made it up far enough to get you an alias?"

"Introducing George Cook—and don't fumble it when I get you on the 'phone. George will be on a fishing trip near Petit Marais." He grinned. "I wonder what name *she* uses at Gislason's Machine-Shop."

"Keep 'phoning us everything," Stein said. "If this really is Marta Penfield, we'll have to make a lot of changes——"

"Let's change it so I can call on that other gal again—Dixon Gale's gal," Irv suggested.

"Better see the nurse. If Marta Penfield is alive, she had important reasons for lying. Possibly we can find out what they were."

Old Dr. Whittemore had died—doubtless of publicity—but the nurse who had cared for Marta Penfield at his sanatorium was now in St. Louis. Possibly there were occasional days when no one persecuted her with questions or reminded her that millions blamed her for the most mysterious disappearance in newspaper history. Agents of Morris Stein had asked her questions, agents of everyone else had asked her questions. Maybe they could get answers now.

"We better not do anything," Irv said flatly, "till we find out how Frank Merriwell makes out when he meets the veiled beauty."

Irv remained lugubrious when they went out. "I can, anyway, change a tyre. But you—I wouldn't give one to ten you could get to Hoboken on the first try. And we're up against the best professionals in the game."

"Sure, we're not Captain Marvel—we're amateurs. But we've got to work with what we've got."

"Never take a bet against the pros. Pros always win. They got to win."

"The book says amateurs finish strong."

"Yeah, all out for Dartmouth. But they're trained to stop when the whistle blows. The pros keep runnin'."

Scott said, "I'll drop the solution in your lap, wrapped in red tissue and tied with tinsel, three days from now. Or say a week."

Irv said curtly, "I hope you live that long," and walked away.

Scott owed himself one all-out dinner. Friends nodded to him at the University Club, two cocktails quadrupled his confidence, and he strolled through blacked-out streets to one of the many prides of

Fifty-second Street. The restaurant was gay with uniforms of colonels, commanders, and still higher ranks; even the cigarette-girl wore a red, white and blue brassière. A third cocktail made Scott sardonic about war's hardships. He finished the last good meal he could count on for an indefinite time—and noticed a man whom the third cocktail dramatized to him as the Enemy. Taylor Damon also was dining at Marcel's.

Or probably not dining, probably had been brought there by his companions, a pink old man and a striking woman. For Damon never touched alcohol, never touched tobacco even, and probably ate only watercress, walnuts, and dry bread. He was without weaknesses, he had no indulgences, he had never felt an emotion. The woman was pretty and smartly dressed; Damon would not even know it, for women were merely creatures who sometimes hindered him by making fools of his subordinates. Possibly they had a place in his philosophy, as breeders of the disciplined robots who were to inhabit the America he intended to build. But you know that he had never contaminated himself by so much as kissing one of them.

He looked like Cromwell, Scott thought. No, like Savonarola. The man of pure intellect, the immortal Thinker, the eternal Puritan—high forehead, impenetrable eyes, ascetic, fleshless, without human weakness, prepared to rid everyone of human weakness by surgical operation or machine-gun fire or whatever might be required. More than that, he looked like the born conspirator. If he were Savonarola, he had always been Lenin as well. The third cocktail loosed in Scott Warner a sting of old defeats and a hate that was deeper than defeat.

The three were leaving, and as they came past Scott's table, Damon recognized him. The funatical lips parted in the contempt that was as close to a smile as Damon ever got. "Bring me up to date, Warner," the American Lenin said. "I understand you've left O.W.I. Will that give you leisure to destroy me again? Say something pretty savage in the *New Republic*?"

Some day that contempt might prove to be the crack in the armour. The perfect Lenin ought no more to feel contempt than love, pity, kindness, or innocent enjoyment. "I'm not writing anything just now, *Führer*," Scott said. "But if I do, will you promise to promote me ten places on *Gaulleiter* Penfield's list of names?"

The third cocktail had let slip that imprudent reference to Penfield. But it forbade caution—and freed a sudden exultation. Here stood Taylor Damon—and did not know that Penfield had been delivered into Scott Warner's hands. Lenin did not know that the woman was alive who would bring the walls down.

"That would make you eleventh from the bottom among the poets," Damon said. "No, that's unfair—say fifteenth from the bottom. You've said some well-phrased things in your time. Send me your next piece."

"I will, *Führer*. And commend me to your Laval."

"You ought to be in uniform, Warner," Damon said. "Your intelligence can't really be very useful to your side."

For some years Gene Penfield had not gone anywhere without a bodyguard following a few paces behind, but Taylor Damon needed no bodyguard. Small saboteurs got burned in the electric chair, inconsiderable puppets who had carried out Damon's orders were in penitentiaries. But Damon would walk any street and enter any room. He was immune.

Scott had arranged in Washington to have a motor-car released to him in Chicago. But, the next evening, he started out by 'plane and, just for caution's sake, started south. The big liner rose above La Guardia Field and Scott's mood was between ecstasy and prayer. Let Tom Fetterman live just a little longer! It need not be long, for Marta Penfield was waiting in Wisconsin. The game was beginning—and, beginning, was already won. He had only to play the cards he had found. They could not lose.

* * * * *

"Find out what Scott Warner has been doing in New York," Taylor Damon said into the telephone. The next day the telephone reported, "Warner resigned from O.W.I." Damon said, "I read the *Times*." The telephone went on, "He hasn't been doing anything. He's been seen with a newspaperman a couple of times, Irv Barney."

"Why not?" Damon said.

The next day the telephone reported, "Warner took a 'plane for New Orleans. They grounded him at Memphis and gave his seat to a brigadier-general."

"Why not? New Orleans is a good town. Still, pick him up there and see what he does."

But Irv Barney, getting no word from Wisconsin, grew gaunt. It was unwise to visit Stein so much, but he had to curse somewhere. A week passed before a George Cook was telephoning him—and talking apologetically. "The name is Marie Royce and there is no doubt whatever. I've met her but that's all I've been able to do. It's not going to be easy."

Irv cursed soulfully but got nothing from George Cook except that they must move warily. "If you were Marie Royce, you'd be careful too. She's bright—if I crowd her I'll ruin everything."

"You finished three days ago—all you had to do was make her talk," Irv said. "You've got just twelve days to pass a miracle, genius." His newspaper nerves burned with frustration—a big story that must not yet be used, that was threatening to be unusable.

Stein had to work hard to keep Irv within bounds. "Now you've got eight days," Irv roared when another telephone call reported only that a pleasant acquaintance was developing and must not be hurried. George Cook protested, "I can't solve the problems on the ground as easily as you can in New York." Irv yelled some more, "You had all

the answers worked out. You made your trap—for goodness' sake spring it."

"Any time you like, you can come out here and take my place."

Irv stood the strain for twenty-four hours more. Then he rumbled at Stein, "He'll blow it sure, one gets you fifty he's blown it already. I can't sit still any more. I'm goin' out and get ready to pick up the pieces. I'm goin' to St. Louis and see the nurse. I'm goin' to Nevada and run through the disappearance-in-the-desert scenario once more. I'm goin' to California and put the squeeze on Dixon Gale's gal. I'm goin' to Denver and see why Fetterman don't die. I'll be the political expert workin' at his job. I'll 'phone you every other minute and let you do the nail-bitin'. None of it adds up and we're all seeing things that ain't there and never were. But if I stay here I'll go nuts."

There were other tensions in New York besides Irv Barney's. So presently Taylor Damon, who had ordered various people to the vicinity of Denver, went West. A man who believed devoutly in Damon's vision had a ranch near Colorado Springs, and from that ranch, by telephone and courier, Damon made out to keep track of many projects, while sometimes he went to Denver by car. There were people to talk to in Denver, and he talked to them.

A man with many projects much watch them all. And one routine 'phone call from New York added negligently, "The county clerk at Oasis, Nevada, says someone has been looking at case records there."

That would be the case of Penfield's wife. No month passed without someone looking into it again for reasons that carried no threat to Damon. But you take no chances. "Find out who he is," Damon said. Later, he remembered that Scott Warner had started for New Orleans and no one had checked him since. He made a note of that.

Two days later, coming in from a meditative stroll in the foot-hills, Damon picked up a magazine which had come in the morning's mail. It was the new *Spectacle*.

* * * * *

That sudden five-o'clock hush followed by the small leisurely sounds of shutting down was the moment Marie Royce liked best of all at the machine-shop. Tired and contented, she covered her typewriter, put away the books, made her desk orderly, grimaced at the chaos of Jim's, and stretched her arms luxuriously. She found that she was whistling softly—and why not? It was pleasant to think of a rise from lathe worker to book-keeper and unofficial general manager. In two years she had made herself indispensable.

She had washed at the dingy basin in the corner and was making-up her lips when Jim Gislason's head and burly shoulders came through the office door. "Come on, babe," Jim said, "our bus for honest working men is making up."

She followed him into the shop. August's first heat-wave had ridden by on a breeze out of the north, but the big room was hot and smelled of oil, grease, filings, metal, scorched wood—pleasant perfumes

all to the honest working woman. Gramp Potter's feet protruded from underneath his drill press and he was swearing in a high, cracked voice at something he was adjusting.

"Come on, Gramp," Jim said. "Fix that tomorrow on company time."

Gramp stood up and rolled down his sleeves. "Eyegod," he said, his glasses gleaming, "when I learned my trade you kept your tools trued up or they took your card away."

"Sure, we're all a bunch of feebs nowadays. In your day a boss was a boss, too."

Clyde Gray, the mild youth with the crooked shoulder, said, "Goin' swimmin' today, Marie?"

"I think not. I've got to wash some clothes."

"Oh-oh," Jim said, "here come them buzzards again. Stick around."

The two union representatives who had appeared late yesterday afternoon were coming through the office door. They were metropolitan products, a small, dapper man with hard eyes who wore a chorus boy's gabardine suit, and a giant with a dull face who swayed like an athlete when he walked. Marie saw that something alert and careful had come into Jim's face.

"Hi, Jack," the smaller man said, "looks as if we've got to check your time-sheets and your social-security records."

"Oh, you got to check my time-sheets and my social-security records."

Marie's skin prickled. In two years she had come to know Jim Gislason thoroughly. When he began to speak softly and slowly, when that bland look came into his face, he was going to make trouble.

"You know how it is, Jack. We got our job, too. We're just working at our job."

"Picked a job it's goin' to take a while to finish up."

"Coupla hours, maybe. That's why we come now, after hours."

"Pretty thoughtful guys, too."

Jim's speech was getting slower with every word, and Marie said hastily, "You take the boys home, Jim. This is my department. I don't mind staying."

"Let me do the broadcastin', babe." Jim stepped through the ring of interested workmen, nearer the visitors. "Just what you figurin' to find in my books?"

"We aren't making trouble, Jack," the small man said. "Nobody's making any kick, just checking up. Just making the rounds for the union. Sister here is right. She can show us the books and you can go roll your hoop."

"I like to get things straight. You're Berg." The small man nodded. "You're Peticic." The big man said, "Yeah," and kept his eyes on Jim. "You're from the state office of the Machinists' Union, at Milwaukee." They both nodded, but Marie saw the big man's

eyes film over. "Headquarters sent you to check my cheek-off. That right?"

"That's right, Jack."

"I like to get things straight." Jim's hands came out of his pockets and hung at his sides. "I'll bet you'd find something, at that. . . . I'm just a wee mite queer," he said, still more slowly. "My mamma told me never to let nobody shake me down. . . . I 'phoned Milwaukee this morning, pal. State headquarters never sent nobody to look at my books. State headquarters never heard of you." He leaned forward and roared, "Get the hell out of my shop before I run you out."

For half a second there was neither sound nor motion. Then everything happened at once. The big man thrust forward, and Jim stepped in and hit him so hard on the jaw that he fell backwards over a work-bench. Clyde Gray threw his lunch-box away and dived on Peticic's chest. Jim had swung towards the dapper man, Berg. Berg's hand came up with something bright in it, but Gramp Potter seized an iron bar and swung it against his arm. Berg screamed and went down as Swede Nelson and two others hit him together. Jim grabbed Peticic's coat, pulled him up, and hit him in the face again. The next moment both men were being rushed towards the door.

Marie ran to an office window. She saw the boys shove the two victims into a waiting taxi, saw Jim shove his head through the window and then emerge again and say something violent to the driver, saw the taxi drive away. The boys turned back towards the shop. Marie leaned against the wall, wondering if she were going to be sick. No. She managed to sit down.

Since January 1940 there had been the certainty that this would happen. There had been only the question of when it would happen. Now it had happened.

Pinned up above Jim's rickety desk was the page of photographs from *Spectacle*.

Once she had had a half-insane notion that fear made your body give off a characteristic odour, as some diseases did. For many months she had half-believed that strangers could smell the fear in her body.

The big doors of the shop rolled shut. Someone was shouting, "Marie! Shake a leg!" There was triumph in that voice—the boys had had a fine fight. She stood up, set the latch on the office door, and stepped outside. She looked round before closing the door on the room which she had made her own proper place. If this was an ending, it was also a beginning. Marie Royce could now move on again. Already the desperate ingenuity that had enabled her to survive was reawakened. It was like a hormone in her blood. It sharpened her instincts like a fleeing animal's.

Jim was behind the wheel of the light truck, Clyde Gray and Gramp Potter beside him, several others dangling their feet over the rear end. Marie sat on Gramp Potter's knees.

"That's right, daughter," Gramp said, "and I'll git younger every milc." The employees of the Gislason Machine-Shop were still exhilarated. "What a pair of cheap yeggs!" Clyde scoffed. "They took us for rubes."

Jim grunted, "Just makin' their play. Maybe you can work a shake-down in Petit Marais. If you don't put it over, no harm done—try the next town."

Clyde asked hopefully, "S'pose they'll be back?"

Jim spat. "Hell, no. They'll get the hell out of Wisconsin fast, I spoiled their racket when I 'phoned Milwaukee."

They would be back. They would be back tonight. . . .

Gramp said, "What you shakin' for, Marie?"

"You old shagbark," Clyde said, "don't you know a refined lady hates brawling?"

She suppressed her trembling and forced a smile to her lips. "It's just that I didn't realize how young you can get, Gramp."

It was two miles from shop to town, and two years had endeared every foot of it to Marie Royce. They passed the grove where she had picnicked with the 4-H, with the Ladies' Aid, with Hattie Smith's boarders—the river where she had canoed with various beaux—the field where the baseball team played in summer evenings. Gramp got out, and she had often scattered grain in his chicken-run. A couple of the boys jumped out at Swenson's Bar, and their "So long, Jim. G'night, Marie," was an honourable fellowship. Here were the post-office, Sanders' Drugstore, John's Eatery, the Oxford Hardware Shop, the Presbyterian Church, the pool hall and news-stand—the whole setting into which Marie Royce had come newborn and, for the first time in the empty life of Marta Leighton Penfield, had worked for a place and earned it.

Everybody else got out, and Jim drove her to Keller's Shoe Repair Shop. She had taken the little two-room flat that made up its second floor, when Jim raised her to thirty-five dollars a week. "Come up for a can of beer, Jim?" she suggested.

She had bought some of these curtains with her earnings, she had made others herself. Second-hand furniture, dishes, the clothes hanging in the closet, the two dozen books—harvest of the honest work of a woman who had created herself out of nothing.

Jim was too keen, too perceptive, too intimate with her not to know that something was wrong. He wiped his mouth with his sleeve and said, "Got a date tonight, Marie?"

"Well, yes. I told George Cook I'd go to a movie with him."

Jim growled. "Not that he ain't okay—for summer folks. But ain't you been seein' quite a lot of him?"

She smiled. "Not half enough, he says. He says when you pick up a girl at Christian Endeavour you're entitled to move faster than he's been able to. Cheer up, Jim—he's going home to Chicago in a few days and there'll be just the local competition."

"Yeah," Jim set down his glass, got out of the chair, and leaned

against the table that held her geranium. Its fragility emphasized his size. He was a big man, strong, careless, impudent. She had created friends out of nothing at all, too. He was the best of them, her boss and her best friend.

Something must have shown in her eyes. He grinned and, with the swift deftness of all his movements, took her in his arms. Just as suddenly her blood leaped. She had not wanted this to happen, she had prevented it from happening often enough before, but now that it had happened it was sweet. She could never have fallen in love with Jim Gislason—but she pressed close to him, her arms went round his neck, and she raised her face. How long since a man had kissed her that way?

"I guess you wouldn't marry me, Marie," he said easily.

For a moment fear and guile had vanished, but they came back now. Still in the circle of his arm, she said, "I guess not, Jim."

"I know. And it ain't because you're a lady, either. Wait a minute!" he said, when she stirred indignantly. "I said it ain't because you're a lady. It's because you're a married lady."

He was as intelligent as anyone she had ever known, and he had intuitions as delicate as a girl's. She stood out of his arms. "How did you know, Jim?"

"Hell, you just kissed me, didn't you? But I knew a long time ago."

"Thanks for not prying."

He leaned carelessly against the door. "I wouldn't insist on no parson," he suggested.

In spite of her whirling emotions she had to laugh. "You move fast from A to B. That's the pass direct, isn't it?"

He grinned. "Well, you never know till you try."

Her throat contracted and she met his eyes. "I think I wouldn't insist on no parson, either."

Impudence left his eyes. "You'll be back from Fond du Lac by twelve o'clock."

That brought back the invincible necessity, the pressure of panic and flight. She was not in love with Jim Gislason, she never could be in love with him—but, a man altogether of a different world from hers, he was nevertheless the best and most trusted friend she had ever had. It had suddenly become intensely desirable to have him knock on her door at midnight. But necessity was going to make her betray his friendship, his affection, whatever amiable and desirous emotion he felt for her. The dearest man she had ever known, the man who had been squarest with her—and necessity required her to betray his decency and squareness. Well, there was no escape, it had to be played out, and he must catch no hint of her panic or her intention. She lied with a smile and a promise. "Not tonight, Jim. Give me a little time. We've got lots of time."

Jim nodded, and, loathsomely, she made her eyes as honest as his. Then she said briskly, "Well, beat it now, Jim. I've got to make

myself pretty for your rival. He isn't much of a rival, but then, I won't be very pretty."

He nodded again and put on his grimy cap. "Look here, babe," he said quietly. "You been ungodly scared ever since that magazine come out. Yeah, ever since that handsome egg was here takin' them pictures. Well, don't. It ain't my business what you're scared of, but nothing's worth being scared of. You've got friends here, Marie. We won't let nothing happen to you."

In his simple world that was quite true. In that world friends of Marie Royce could protect her from murder and even from the fear of murder. In that world you could go to the police, you could tell the truth, you could face your terror down and take the poison out of it for ever. But the moment Marie Royce told the truth to anyone, Marta Penfield would be revealed. Marie Royce might be scared, but Marta Penfield would live in terror. Would live in terror for a little while—the terror of certain death. That was precisely why Marta Penfield could not stay on in Jim's world but must leave it at once, and must leave it, as always, a liar. "I'm not scared of anything, Jim."

"Okay, babe, play it that way. Any time you want to play it some other way, just say so. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Wait!" He would take it as a promise, he wouldn't know it was good-bye. Her body and her spirit went into that kiss. She held him close, and the tears in her eyes did not spill over. She would remember that one man had wanted nothing from her except what she would freely give. "Good-bye, Jim!" He smiled at her over his shoulder.

The pulse-beat which proved how satisfactorily she had been kissed subsided. A few minutes later it was a pulse-beat of mortal panic. For a moment she was the mere skinful of fear that had quivered through unending time at Dr. Whittemore's. She put a stop to that. An animal in flight could not yield to fear, for fear begot mistakes.

She got out a little bag, not big enough to tire her or to be conspicuous. Stockings and shoes—she had learned that if you had enough of them, nothing else mattered much. The fifty-nine-cent stockings and three-fifty shoes of Marie Royce. Toilet articles, for to be inconspicuous you must be neat and clean. Sleeping-pills, for an animal in flight must not lie awake.

She had till some hours after dark, for they would not come back while the men who had beaten them up could readily see them. Say midnight. Midnight would bring not a lover knocking at her door but a pair of murderous thugs. Thugs who were employees of Gene Penfield. First and second murderers.

There was a bus to Green Bay at 8.50 in front of the pool-hall. No. Green Bay was northward; the lakes would cut off flight. And not southward, either: that way were Fond du Lac and the thugs, Chicago, the world where people remembered photographs. Westward, then. There was a bus to La Crosse at 10.20. That left her perilously little margin, but it would have to do.

She bathed swiftly—she was a working woman and grime of Gislason's Machine-Shop would be in her hands and scalp for a long time yet. She put on clean underwear and folded two changes in the little travelling-bag. Brushing her hair, she paused to study the mirrored face for signs of fear or flight. Her eyes were brilliant, her cheeks pale—would strangers be able to interpret them?

In the old Leighton house at Sacramento there was a portrait of Marta Leighton's great-grandmother, the almost legendary Marta Faustina Maria Paredes y Penalosa. On Marta's sixteenth birthday someone had said that she was beginning to be Faustina Paredes. That night she had had to put on a lace night-gown and a scarlet shawl to bring out the resemblance, but year by year it had grown plainer. The mirror now showed her Faustina's glossy black hair, high forehead, high disdainful nose, and arrogantly sloping, dead-white shoulders. But her legs were longer and slimmer, her breasts were higher and smaller and more pointed—the American Californians had accomplished that for the Spanish Californians. There had been a poem about a man who had been killed for love of Faustina Paredes. Men who were killed for Marta Leighton Pensfield were not killed for love, and there would be no poem about her.

Get dressed! A cheap little white linen suit from the Bon Ton Store. No, for linen wrinkled and soiled too quickly. There was another suit, grey flannel, which had cost fifteen dollars and come from Fond du Lac and so was practically Fifth Avenue. She put it on. She thought, emotionlessly, that she had had better clothes when she left the desert. Also, the old doctor had got her plenty of money. Now she had about ten dollars in her bag. She could cash small cheques at the drugstore, the news-stand, John's Eatery. Thirty dollars' worth would be inconspicuous and safe.

She wrote them out. There was a balance of more than three hundred dollars—and she would never be able to claim it. She had earned that money! She had abandoned her husband's fortune and her family's without a qualm, but this went deep. She would work out some way of getting it! . . . But she had skill for sale now, she had a trade. Two trades: she could operate a lathe, she could keep books. Some big mill somewhere, with thousands of workers. . .

For more than two years she had lived under a suspended sentence. Sentence had now been executed.

Jim would not see her at the shop tomorrow or find her here when he came to investigate. She went weak with sudden passion and resolve. Find Jim, say good-bye to him in the right way, spend an hour in his arms before vanishing! She fought the dizzy sweetness off. Jim was just one man more who must pay in disillusionment for thinking well of her.

A station-wagon stopped in the twilight across the street. She had forgotten that she had a date with George Cook!

He came across the street whistling and started up the stairs—a cheerful feather-brain. He had tried to give Marie Royce any vaca-

tioner's rush of any country girl. Marta Penfield had held him off, suspicious of the one person from her own world she had met in more than two years. Get rid of him—fast!

"Hi, Marie!" He lounged through the door, amiably ingratiating. "Look, I'm frightfully sorry, but I've got to break the date; I can't go."

"I was just going to leave a note for you that I can't."

"Worse still, there won't be a return engagement. Vacation is over—I'm summoned back to the treadmill. I've got to leave tonight. For Duluth."

The well-trained fugitive reacted instantly. Duluth—and now. No public bus, no witnesses, and at least a hundred and fifty miles farther than she could get otherwise. "Tonight?" she said. "Can you make Duluth overnight?"

"Almost. But you behold a bitter man, Marie. My intentions were never honourable and now they're frustrated——"

"Skip it. Will you let me ride to Duluth with you?"

He stared. "You're going to Duluth?"

"Thereabouts." She nodded at the little bag on the table.

"Jackpot! Let you? I'll pay you a bonus and charm you with my talk. When can you be ready?"

She picked up her hat. "Right now."

She looked round the small, neat living-room and followed him downstairs. She cashed her three cheques. She knelt on the seat cushion and watched Petit Marais shimmer into the dusk behind them. Twenty-five months since she had come here. The cycle had been completed and was starting over—out of the dark into the dark. Tears stood out on her cheeks, but she did not sob and George Cook could not see.

He had a summer cabin on Nashoba Pond, five miles out from Petit Marais. His stuff was packed and he stowed it in the station-wagon—a travelling-bag, a blanket roll, fishing-rods, coats, a folding canvas cot. "See here," he said. "I'll have to stay awake, but you won't." He unfolded the cot and set it up lengthwise in the car. "The passenger's berth awaits her whim."

"My whim runs to supper."

But when they stopped at a roadside restaurant, she ate hastily and anxiously. There was that old, too-familiar fear that everyone was staring at her. She knew that she would soon master it, but it unnerved her, summoning up innumerable other anxieties that would be travelling with her again.

She was relieved when they got under way again. This was the real start. And she had had incredible luck. There was the luck that they hadn't struck at sight. There was the luck that Jim had unmasked them. There was this marvellous luck of getting out of town unobserved, of travelling a long distance before anyone could know that she had left, even those who would be looking for her in an hour or two.

A thought struck suddenly: *'Why, I'm fighting back!'* She had moved immediately, decisively, without hesitation. The idea of giving

up had never entered her mind. She was healed! The old doctor had been afraid she would kill herself. The fear he voiced to a thousand questioners after she had disappeared had been an honest fear. He had seen reasons enough, in the months she had spent at Santo Espiritu. But now she had never thought of suicide. *'I'm fighting back, I'm doing something about it. Maybe that gives me a chance.'*

"Nice night, Marie."

"It's a beautiful night. I feel fine."

Maybe there was more than relief in having made a successful move. Maybe there was a kind of zest in knowing that she had to live on the edge of disaster again. . . . It was a beautiful night—coolness of the woods becoming coldness, the stars enlarging, traffic thinning, little towns looking more asleep when they drove through them. George Cook chatted a little. He was not a person, he was a mere agency, a tool she could use. When he seemed warming up to talk more volubly, she switched on the car radio and lay back listening to faint dance music coming from Milwaukee.

Don't think of Petit Marais. Don't think of Jim or your other friends. Don't think of the thugs, or your husband, or the days ahead of you. Live in this moment—think back no further than the last moment and no farther ahead than the next one. Listen to dance music and think nothing at all.

The dashboard clock showed 11.15 when he pulled up at the side of the road, got out a canvas bucket, and said he was going to get water for a radiator which certainly needed no water. He stayed away a tactful-timed five minutes. When he came back, he said, "Better go to bed, Marie."

Yes, she must take no chances with sleep. He spread a blanket on the canvas cot, held a thick sweater for her to put on, and inflated an air-cushion for her head. Unperceived, she got a sleeping-pill from her handbag and swallowed it, then lay down on the cot. He spread another blanket over her. "It's not the Ritz," he said, "but you'll be lucky if you never see worse. See you at breakfast, Marie."

She felt a mild thankfulness for George Cook's good taste in asking no questions—or was it just his stupidity?—and then forgot him. The sway and dip of the car felt horizontally were soothing. Out of the corner of her eye she could just see the line where the edge of the headlight beam, advancing across trees, met the darkness. The stars were near, the night silent.

She thought, 'This proves that Gene now knows for certain that I'm alive—or he will know when they find I'm gone—he knows now that I didn't die.' And she thought: 'I fought back without ever doubting that I must, so maybe I've got a chance.'

CHAPTER TWO

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS BEFORE THE BRAWL AT THE GISLASON MACHINE-Shop, Irv Barney was at a little town in Colusa County, California. He felt more ineradicably than ever before in his life that he was a heel. The great Penfield case was all slime, and it defiled everyone who touched it. Now it brought slime into this peaceful setting of olive trees, oak trees, walnut trees, yellow fields of grain, sweet water, and blue sky. It was likely to defile one who had so far escaped, Ann Sloane, daughter of an invalided major who had been called back into the army and had left her to take care of his peach-orchard, his small house, his two dogs and his two horses. If it did defile her, it would do so through Irv Barney, the complete heel. What made it more intolerable was her unaffected pleasure in seeing him again. She was a quiet girl—and a trusting girl, a pretty girl, small, and sweetly made, soft-spoken, tanned so deeply that her yellow hair seemed almost silver.

"I never saw that one," she had said when he showed her one of the unpublished photographs. "She was beautiful, wasn't she?" she said several times. And she talked more freely than she ever had before. Irv helped her turn water into the rose garden, mend a fence, clean up a eating-shed. She got lunch for him. She sat with him under a great oak in still afternoon. She talked willingly. She answered questions.

Even when an allusion to Dixon Gale allowed him to say, "You were in love with him, weren't you?"

Ann Sloane nodded, gazing at the scuffed tips of her sandals. "He was a simple guy, like me. He liked simple things—horses and dogs and ranches and hunting. That's why he liked to come here. That's why he liked me. He didn't like all that notoriety, but Gene Penfield was his friend, that's all. Yes, we were going to get married. Till," she said quietly, "till Marta put her brand on him."

"You think that happened?"

"Of course. I don't know why she bothered, because you don't think of Marta and simple guys. And it wasn't fair, for no simple guy would have a chance. But she could take anything she wanted. She took him. It got him killed."

She had said 'killed', and Ann Sloane didn't have any doubts. "You never said anything at any of the investigations."

"He was dead. I wouldn't have said it if he was alive, so how could I?"

"Even to punish a murderer?"

"Husbands are supposed to shoot their wives' lovers, aren't they?" Ann said, rather desolately than bitterly. "I didn't know anything, and if I had it wouldn't have touched Marta. And he was dead—what good could it do? And I didn't know anything."

So Ann Sloane had solved the mystery to her own satisfaction, and had reached the same solution as Scott Warner and Irv Barney. . . .

With careful indirections, trying not to press, moving as delicately as he could, he suggested other possibilities, but the girl would have none of them. "I've thought a lot. I've had a lot of time to think."

Her willingness to talk made him increasingly a heel—and revealed nothing whatever that was new or informative, no hint or clue or suggestion. Except, quite suddenly, as a parenthesis.

"I think I was always afraid of Marta's wanting him—she always wanted everything—but I didn't suspect anything. Then, quite suddenly, he was changed. It was when he came back from a week-end flight he'd made with Gene. They flew to Natal and came back. I don't know who the third person was——"

Irv had memorized that flight, with all other winnowed details. "There wasn't any. It was just the two of them. As you put it, just a week-end flight."

"That's what they kept saying at the hearings, but there was, Dixon told me there was. Some friend of Professor Idsu's——"

"Professor Idsu?"

"At Berkeley—at the university. He was an artist and a friend of Gene's—and Marta's. A little later he went back to Japan. Anyway"—she hurried on, Irv not daring to break the communication—"when they came back, they had quarrelled. They never had in all the years. So what was there to quarrel about? I knew! I'd been afraid of it and I knew. Dixon was unhappy—oh, terribly restless, even desperate. What would make him? He never had been before. He didn't tell me anything and I saw him quite often still, but it was—oh, all broken up. Deception wasn't easy for him—he was a simple, honest guy. It would break your heart."

She was over the heartbreak, for she would talk limpidly about it, amplifying but saying nothing that counted. When he dared he mentioned Professor Idsu again, without learning anything. Half an hour later, however, she did say, "I saw him as late as anyone, I guess, except Professor Idsu. He was here before he went to Silvertip that . . . that last time. I think he wanted to tell me but he was too—too loyal. He said something about Professor Idsu. It didn't mean anything. Something about flying him to Portland, I think. When he said good-bye, he looked like death. I knew why. And I was right."

None of this was worth the trouble of coming here except that it showed an insider had reached the same theory about the shooting. Well, so had thousands of newspaper readers. But Irv found it easy to stay on in the quiet of the grove, looking off to distant mountains and alternately looking at Ann Sloane. These days you were always thinking and talking about peace—and here it was. It was late afternoon when he roused himself to go. Ann Sloane walked to the bus station with him, bareheaded, the black-and-white settler pacing solemnly at her heels.

"What would you do if Marta turned up alive, after all?" he asked.

She considered that gravely. "Do you hate whatever happened to your leg that gave you that little limp?" Then she smiled a little. "It

was a long time ago. So long I don't believe in it much, any more. I've got to run our orchard."

At the station she took his hand. "You like this valley, don't you? I wish whatever this job you're working on may be, I wish it brought you here oftener. You're pretty mysterious, Irv, but I like to see you. Maybe you'd feel better growing peaches."

He watched her walk away in brilliant sun, tan shirt, blue jeans trousers, the setter beginning to run excited circles round her. He loathed himself as a ten-cent Sherlock Holmes, a fake wise guy, who came into pleasant villages and was committed to making trouble for pleasant girls. . . . Reaching Sacramento, he got through to Morris Stein by telephone at last. Nothing more had been heard from Scott Warner. He told Stein to sift everything they knew about that flight to Natal and to find out what could be found out about one Professor Idsu, late of Berkeley. He mentioned the possible flight to Portland. He swore mournfully and hung up. He strolled about the darkened streets of Sacramento—Marta Penfield's home town, and nothing to be learned there—till it was time to take a 'plane to Denver, where Tom Fetterman was still obstinately refusing to die.

* * * * *

At about 6.30 in the morning Scott Warner turned the station-wagon up a wood road that wound among big pines along the shore of a lake. Mist hung low above the water, but was beginning to loop and lift. After a couple of miles he turned out of the ruts into an opening in the woods which hid the car from road and lake alike. He got out and stretched, then got his bag.

The girl turned on the cot and slung a forearm over her eyes but did not wake. Her sleeping face looked more innocent, and her relaxed body under the blanket looked more insubstantial than he cared to believe. He went down to the shore: no summer camp was in sight and he had passed none on the road. He shaved and then, stripping, dived in and swam a few yards. The water was icy, but it leached the night's fatigue from him. He dressed, put on a clean shirt, repacked the bag, and went back to the car. She was still asleep. He managed to get the folding oil-stove and a box of food without waking her.

He had water boiling when Marta Penfield got out of the car to stand beside him, shivering and trying to shake the wrinkles out of her skirt. "Good morning," she said. "It will take time for me to believe this. Where are we?"

"I make it about an hour and a half from Duluth—it was a good night's drive." He got her small bag and a towel from his. "Nobody can see you and I recommend a swim. The water is a test of character, but it's rewarding."

She laid a cheap wrist-watch on the running-board and walked off through the trees. Presently, slicing the bread he had bought before calling for her last evening, he heard the soft splash of an expert crawl-

stroke. . . . He reserved judgment about Marta Penfield. If the month in which she had refused all intimacy and denied him an opening of any kind had been frustrating and infuriating, it had taught him to respect her talents. Her complete self-command last night, her instant acceptance of a situation that had certainly terrified her, her instant readiness to act merely proved again the courage and ingenuity he had always theoretically endowed her with. He had known for two years that only such qualities could succeed in such a masquerade. Even so, he knew now that he had underestimated her.

Well, the situation was reversed now and he held the trumps. Events had delivered her into his hands, and if this mutual flight was dangerous it was therefore the more useful. Two days ago he had known at sight that the two strangers in Petit Marais must be agents of Taylor Damon, dispatched immediately on the publication of *Spectacle*, and she had understood as much yesterday. Since she would certainly be followed, since he was the instrument of escape, she was wholly dependent on him. . . . First of all he must get in touch with Irv Barney, last heard from at Phoenix and rabid with failure and impatience, and tell him the tremendous change that had occurred.

As for Marta Penfield, the principle question was when would be the best time to tell her that he knew who she was. Well, wait and see how the cards fell.

She had made up her lips, but the high colour in her cheeks was the lake's creation. She was immaculately neat, not a hair out of place, yesterday's blue blouse replaced by a light sweater. Scott wondered why the unconscious arrogance of her walk had not unmasked her a thousand times. Her poise was absolute. She must be under a terrible tension of shock, fear, and doubt. There was no sign of them.

He had the radio tuned to a news broadcast. Marta Penfield switched it off in the middle of a dispatch about fighting in the Solomons. Scrutinizing the smallest details, Scott felt that there must be some significance in that, but if so he did not know what it was. "Can I help you?" she asked, altogether naturally.

Eggs, toast, marmalade—he had bought them at 5.30 yesterday. They ate unhurriedly. Sunlight brightened, a breeze blowing the mist away in streamers. The woods were aromatic, there was a movement of birds, the slap of a fish breaking water was curiously loud. A feeling which he had had frequently during the last month recurred with tremendous impact. He sat here in the early morning of the Wisconsin north woods, casually, even agreeably—and he was with the most publicized woman in America. She had been publicized for the most variegated reasons—by her husband's inexhaustible publicity, by her beauty, by the ambiguities of a notorious death, by her disappearance. And here she was. She sat on a blanket in the shade of his motor-car, smoked a cigarette and finished her coffee—completely relaxed, the lines of her body in untroubled repose, a few pine needles clinging to her skirt, her dark eyes quite unreadable. It was fantastically unreal, and here it was.

He cleaned the utensils with wet sand and began to pack them. She said, "You're saving the food. Does that mean that you're going on past Duluth?"

This might be the right opening. He sat down again and looked at her inquiringly. Her face had its surface frankness which was quite impenetrable. "You've been very off-hand about this," she said. "You probably understand I'm leaving Petit Marais for good. If I could thumb a ride with you today too it would . . . save me money."

"Where are you going?"

That got no rise. "If you're heading towards either Grand Forks or Yankton, I'd be grateful for the ride. I can take a bus or a train this evening."

That was the whole spread of the Dakotas, and he could not well go beyond Duluth without heading towards one or the other. "Are you in a hurry, Marie?"

"Reasonably." She was in flight from thugs—and showed no sign of any emotion. "The thumber can't be in more of a hurry than the host. Will you take me?"

That postponed the need of finding an opening. "Sure. I'm going on West. It will be swell to have you along."

"Then I think you'd better get some sleep. Go ahead, George. I'll wake you any time you say to."

So they left it. He stretched out on the cot, with sun slanting through the trees and jays noisy overhead. Marta Penfield sat in the shade of some small spruces, leaning back against a hummock, legs straight out in front of her. She was an image of relaxation. Danger and the long chance had taught her not to use the smallest item of her energy till there was need for it. He thought there was something feral in her unshakable self-command. In a month he had been able to make out nothing of the woman beneath that poise. What did she make of him? She didn't bother to make anything. He happened to be useful at the moment and she would use him. That was all.

It was almost eleven o'clock when he woke. The sun was stronger, the jays still noisy. Marta had moved with the shade and was now lying on her back, waiting tranquilly for time to begin again. He saw her eyes focused on the tree-tops, saw her breast rise with her breath. Doubt, fear, and flight would still be with her and were still held in check. It was going to be damned hard to break that imperturbability.

They resumed the journey, talking idly or falling into silence without strain. He was able to match her capacity for ignoring the tremendous. . . . It was past noon when they came into downtown Duluth. Marta Penfield studied her pocket-book, and asked if there would be time to have her hair waved. He nodded and drew up at a big hotel. She smiled. "Not here—I can't afford it. Keep going and I'll watch." In a drab side-street she said, "Shampoo and set, one dollar—this will do." Getting out, she stood for a moment, and he wondered if there was a momentary doubt in her eyes when she said, "You'll come back here for me?"

He nodded. "I'll even take you to lunch."

"Why don't we make it a picnic again?"

Quick thinking had gone into that suggestion, and there was careful thinking in the shampoo. She had calculated loss of time and shrinkage of money against the fugitive's need to be inconspicuously neat. She was formidable.

Scott drove back to the big hotel and put in a call for Irv Barney in Phoenix. The girl had difficulty getting a circuit. He bought an afternoon paper and began to study it—and began also to fret with the impatience he had had to suppress. There was no word of Tom Fetterman; there had been none for ten days. Clearly the old Senator lived on in Denver, dying too slowly for someone who waited on him, much too fast for Scott Warner's purpose. The operator smiled and shook her head, still unable to get Phoenix. Scott muttered and started through his newspaper again, more carefully.

He stood up, shocked, cold, half paralysed. But yes, of course! It had been foreseeable, even inevitable, and he had not foreseen it. He, who had to foresee everything and was permitted no mistakes. In an instant everything had changed infinitely for the worse. The whole structure had collapsed.

He said, "Cancel that call," and went swiftly out of the lobby. That could be bad too. For his name—at least, the name of George Cook, his Petit Marais name—was on the girl's record. Soon or late it would be found.

He was the man who was supposed to think fast—that was the reliance of his little band of hopefuls. So, think fast! Well, first find a crooked garage. It took him an hour of guarded questions, in shabby streets and back rooms. Finding one, he had to spend a hundred dollars of Morris Stein's money. Then he bought a basket-lunch, canned goods, Coca Cola—they were going to need things now he hadn't counted on.

He was not going to be able to plan what to do. What he must do was going to be forced on him. And the weapon he had pointed invisibly at Marta Penfield, the secure power he held over her, had wholly lost its force.

She was waiting in front of the cheap beauty-parlour and there was a small glint of relief in her eyes when she saw him. He glanced at a couple of packages. "Soap and a towel," she said, and got in beside him. A few minutes later, reaching an arterial highway, he felt her gaze on him. Look out! He must be showing excitement.

The suburbs left behind, he watched for a place where they could eat lunch reasonably safe from intrusion, but found none he would trust for nearly an hour. Finally he drove up a sandy trail in scrub timber, stopped, and got out a blanket and the basket-lunch. Early afternoon was hot, and the place smelled swampy. They ate in silence. She flattened the cardboard container, folded the waxed paper, leaped sand over them. Then she sat down again and, looking squarely at him, said, "What happened in Duluth that made you anxious, George?"

In the poised moment, he thought impersonally that she was beautiful and gallant. The fact meant nothing at all, but it was a fact. The body of Marta Penfield was an extraordinary harmony, an extraordinary subtlety, it was sweet and fulfilled, it was charged with life. And the spirit of Marta Penfield had carried her through the impossible. Too bad to destroy such a woman, and before the end he would probably have to.

"I'll show you," he said. He got the Duluth newspaper from his jacket in the car. Kneeling beside her, he spread it out on the coarse grass and pointed to a short dispatch on an inside page, under a Fond du Lac headline. He knew it by heart:

James Gislason, proprietor of a machine-shop at Petit Marais, twelve miles from here, was found murdered early this morning in the Main Street apartment of his bookkeeper, Marie Royce. Shot three times, Gislason had apparently died about midnight. Marie Royce could not be found, and there were indications that she had taken to flight. State Police . . .

Her shoulder, which was touching his, went tight. A thin sound came from her lips; it had begun, but didn't finish, as a scream. She got to her feet, and he leaped up too, but she came pitching down to her knees again. Her face was drawn and so white that her rouged lips were hideous.

"Jim!" The eyes she turned towards Scott weren't seeing anything. "He came back for me. And they came back for me."

"Lie down!" He took her shoulders and forced her down. "For heaven's sake, let go and bawl."

It took her some minutes, but in the end she began to sob. Scott sat watching her, able for a brief space to afford the luxury of pity. Her sobbing became violent so that her prone body shook and twisted, then as the minutes passed it quieted to a spasmodic shudder. It stopped altogether and she lay still. She sat up. Something in her face had died, and something in her voice.

"He came back. He thought I'd promised." He was waiting for me and they came. He fought with them again and they shot him." Scott did not move. Her head went down on her knees. "I killed him." Scott said nothing. "Another man—every man who . . ."

His blood leaped, for that was the first harvest from a long effort. There was no mistaking the allusion. She was alluding to Dixon Gale, probably her lover, certainly shot at Silvertip. She didn't finish. Minutes passed. "They think I shot him. And I—they see I've run away." She was beginning to be aware, if only a little aware, of her situation. Their situation. She tried to get up, but her arm buckled when she put her weight on it. She sat still. "Of course. I've got to go back to Petit Marais. You've got to take me back. Now."

That was the signal. Now was the time to complete this ghastly job. "Can you go back?" he asked quietly.

She began to get it; her mind began to turn from Gislason to herself. "No." There should have been fear in her eyes before this; now that it began to show, it was not pleasant to see. "How do you know?"

"The State Police are looking for you. Probably by this time they've gone to my camp. They're looking for me too—or soon will be. About three hundred miles away. Our descriptions are already far ahead of us."

She tried to grapple with that, and shock had slowed down her mind. He said, "Marie, take off your shoes." She gaped at him. "Take off your shoes!" She was certainly in shock, for she obeyed him, unlacing the smart, cheap Oxfords.

He intended to be quiet and cool, but his voice shook and roughened. "Now you won't be able to walk very far, Mrs. Penfield."

Instinct alone brought her to her feet. Probably there was no sight in her eyes. She started down the sandy road, and when he seized her arms she struggled with a strength that was all instinct. It went out of her altogether and she sprawled on the grass. Scott got a bottle of whisky from the car and practically forced some into her. Under her lipstick her mouth was blue.

He spoke sharply. "You see, you're not made of steel. You could stand Gislason's death and keep going. You might stand being hunted by the police. You might even stand being unmasked. But quite clearly you can't stand all three. You've come to a passage that you can't play all alone. You've got to have help. You've got to have my help."

It was clear that she would never collapse altogether. The instinct to fight back against a hostile world would keep her going even when, as now, she was numb with shock. What held her together was some fundamental tenacity. And some fundamental recuperative power would bring her back, was already neutralizing shock cell by cell.

"You recognized that picture." She whispered the words again. Then she began to think. "But you were at Petit Marais long before it came out."

"You're right in seizing on the picture—it's what licked you. But I saw it in proof-sheets, a month ago . . . The masquerade is over—we've disposed of Marie Royce. So—we'll get rid of George Cook too. My name is Warner, Scott Warner."

"Scott Warner . . . Oh! You . . ."

"Right again—it's your husband I'm interested in, not you. Yes, I wrote *Fascist America* and innumerable other assaults on him and his master. I'm here in the hope of making a final one."

"In the end, he'll kill you."

"He may send someone to try. Like the gentlemen from the underworld his owner sent to Petit Marais. But Geno Penfield doesn't kill people himself."

"Oh . . ."

It was the intonation. He would have risked his life that she had started to say, "Oh, doesn't he?" With the shock on her she had let

slip the utmost he had dared to hope for. Gene Penfield had killed Dixon Gale, and Scott Warner's theory was vindicated. She had stopped in time. Well, they would come back to that.

She slumped over in the grass. Time passed uncared while emotions indescribable and not to be shared possessed her. In flight, she had the wariness of an animal, and she had the fierce, armed privacy of a wounded animal.

He got a screwdriver and the Minnesota licence-plates which he had bought at the Duluth garage. He removed the Illinois licence-plates and buried them. As he finished, Marta Penfield got to her feet. He was still finding metaphors; this time she was a dazed prizefighter instinctively getting up before the count of ten.

He said, "We've ended a masquerade. Now we've got to begin an impersonation. I bought illicit licence-plates and car registration at Duluth. The registration is made out to Henry Hammond, who lives at 3804 Cottage Avenue, Minneapolis. It's not a name I'd choose but it's our name. We're a true married pair. I'm—well, say an insurance man. We're heading West on vacation. Glacier Park, maybe? I'll buy an outfit at the first opportunity. We've shown some talent for impersonation."

"Whatever you want from me," she said huskily, "there's no chance you'll get it. No chance at all. None in the world."

She was, he knew, a few months short of twenty-seven years old; in an hour she had come to look fifty, but she was still erect, still defiant. "Mrs. Penfield," he said, "I'm erratic, easily upset, frequently crack-brained, never a figure of brutal masculine aggression. But I warn you, first, that you have seriously underestimated me, and second, that I am insanely stubborn. You're quite right: I want something from you. And you're altogether wrong: I'll get it. If there were time I'd deeply admire you for having won so far against odds of a hundred and thirty million to one. You'll go on trying to win. You'll try to outwit me, get rid of me, or destroy me. Go ahead. Simply remember that I need only step into any newspaper- or telegraph-office and you'll push the World War off every front page in the United States."

Hell! That was worse than an exhibition; it was mere gas. He grinned. "That is, when the time comes. But first we've got to be firm allies, absolute friends, and even man and wife. Before we can duel to the death we've got to get away from the police. We're suspected of murder and we're being looked for."

He added, gently, "Stretch out on the cot. I saw sedative capsules in your handbag—you'd better take one. You'd better do what crying you can. Certainly you'd better sleep, if you can."

She had certainly had black hours to live through, but none that could have been so saturated with despair as this one. The immediate shock would lessen, but he anticipated that a couple of days from now all her tensions would merge together and she would break badly, however briefly. Well, the first job was to improvise an escape. Driving as fast as he dared—for they must not attract police attention—he

thought as hard as he could. Certainly they must go west. They must make for the country, where there were fewer teletypes and police radios, fewer aeroplanes, fewer chances for pursuit to leap ahead of them, more space to dissolve into. Should he stick to highways or seek back-roads? Well, it was best to get as far as possible as fast as possible, which meant highways.

From time to time he called some of his conclusions over his shoulder. Marta Penfield said nothing—merely lay there staring at the top of the ear. He did not voice the more general questions that wove through the immediate ones. How much would Irv Barney and Morris Stein be able to make out from the newspapers, and what could they do? How could they move to help him? What steps were the Wisconsin police taking? Above all, how much did Taylor Dannon know by now, and what was he doing?

The forests and lakes of upper Minnesota sped by them and at the end of the afternoon they approached Bemidji. Scott called her to sit beside him. "I think the first hunch was good, we're heading for a vacation in Glacier Park. Bemidji is a vacation town. Buy whatever clothes will let you dress the part."

She said tonelessly, "I've got about forty dollars."

"You're impersonating the wife of a man who has saved money for a vacation." He gave her a sheaf of Morris Stein's bills.

And he spent freely to costume the masquerade. He bought an umbrella tent, purely for naturalness. A couple of sleeping-bags, which might really find a use. The fishing-clothes in his bag would do, but he bought a heavy jacket. A lot of canned food . . . Marta's arms were full of packages when he joined her. The station-wagon was well equipped for a vacation, but it might be necessary to abandon it at any moment; it would certainly have been wise to abandon it right now if there had been any way of getting a less identifiable conveyance. The glistening new white-sidewall tyres were particularly bad.

Lake Bemidji was red with sunset and before long he turned off into a state camping-area and set up the oil-stove. Silently Marta set about helping him. In the firelight he caught a glint of gold on her left hand. She saw his glance. "You can get wedding-rings at the ten-cent store," she said.

That showed that the recuperative process was at work. . . . Full dark had come when they finished eating. The supplies packed, she got her bundles and disappeared into the underbrush. He too changed to his outing clothes. When she came back his flashlight showed a short, dark green skirt and jacket, walking-shoes, a tan blouse, a hat with a red feather in it. "I don't like slacks and I didn't get any," she said. "I'm not going to leave my flannel suit behind, either. But do you pass the costume?"

Back at the car, she said, "You mean to drive all night? . . . You can't go without sleep for ever. You'd better lie down on the cot and let me drive." He hesitated, and she said stonily, "You've pointed out that I've got no choice but to stay with you and do what you tell me."

"I was wondering whether you feel up to driving."

"You see, I've been here before, escaping is no new experience for me."

"All right, stick to U.S. 2 and keep going."

He saw her face bleak in the hooded light from the dash, and went to sleep almost as soon as they were moving. He woke several times, always to the steady motion of the car, once to a swishing sound as if they were running through a shower. Then he came sharply awake. The car was stopped, there was a queer light at the window, and Marta was talking to someone. His nerves ice, Scott turned over noiselessly and stared. An oil-lantern showed her head and shoulders, showed a man in overalls at the window. Scott's groping fingers closed on a camp axe.

But her voice was confidently cool. ". . . to Glacier Park, and we're trying to make time. It's my turn to drive while my husband sleeps. But I felt sleepy and I turned off the road for a nap."

"I saw the car," the man with the lantern said in a rich drawl. "It's a pretty lonesome stretch. Thought I'd better see if somebody had had an accident."

"Thanks," Scott said. He climbed over the seat. "Maybe it's silly to drive all night. But we want to get as much of the Park as we can in two weeks."

"Yeah"—drily. "The worse you feel the better time you're having. Okay, I'll get along. Glad you didn't have a steering-post in your chest, mister. So long, lady." The lantern glimmered towards the road, which, Scott saw, was on an embankment here. A farm truck clanked alive and its lights moved off.

"Next time I hope I'm awake. I woke up badly scared," Scott said.

"After a while you'll realize that they really aren't looking straight at your secret—they're just trying to help you . . . I forgot your first name."

"Henry." His watch showed 2.30. "Where are we?"

"West of Grand Forks, maybe twenty miles . . . I'm not quite as—as steady—as I thought I was. I began to get—shaky. So I stopped."

"I'll take over. Get back there and get some sleep."

A slight quiver, the first, was in her voice. "I might be able to drive, but I couldn't sleep. Let me stay here. Don't ask me to lie there and—think."

He got behind the wheel, first wrapping her in a blanket, for the plains wind was cold. On the highway again, he accelerated into now familiar emptiness and dark. Night in a vacant universe, the headlights searching mere space, the stars thickly sown, the roadside created and destroyed as they hurried on. The earlier sense of unreality came back, enveloping the woman beside him, the search behind them, whatever end they might be moving towards. But the day had greatly increased his wholly impersonal admiration of Marta Penfield.

She said in a small voice that seemed far away, "All I know is that

you're the man who found out about me first. And that you're Gene's mortal enemy. Obviously you're my enemy too. What are you going to tell me? How much? Certainly you'll tell me what you hope to get from me—when you think you can get it. Is that all? Would anything else be bad tactics?"

"We can't afford a private war while the police want us," he said grimly. He let the car's speed slacken, thinking hard. This was a place, probably, to play the smaller cards, to toss in some white chips. "Nobody else has ever studied you as hard as I have, Mrs. Penfield. With the help of some friends. I began to study you in April 1939, when Dixon Gale was shot." She neither spoke nor stirred at the name and in a moment he went on, "When you went to Dr. Whittemore's sanatorium that June, the secret was as closely guarded as Gene Penfield's money and influence could make it, but I knew. I kept on finding out what I could about you. When the news broke in January—January 30, 1940—that you were probably dead, I knew you pretty well, I thought. I had an idea that you weren't dead, that you had made up a drama and got away with it. I've been learning what I could about you ever since."

"I see," she said, without emotion. "To think of a stranger I'd never heard of, across the country from me, prying into my life all that time! I can see you're in earnest, and you certainly must have learned a lot. Or your guesses are lucky."

"Not guesses, Mrs. Penfield . . . hell, people dodging blood-hounds can't go on mistering each other." He snorted. "But neither Marie nor Marta will do. Nor George nor Scott . . . Not guesses—careful deductions made by a man who couldn't afford to accept the easy solutions. Well, I think you really had a breakdown, a collapse, when you went to Santo Espiritu. Dr. Whittemore was an old friend of your family's. He had known you all your life. He certainly preferred you to your husband." Again he waited and again she made no response. "When you decided to die, he helped you. That's certain—you couldn't have done it without his help and the nurse's, Eleanor Price. I think you simply walked out from Santo Espiritu to the crossroads of Oasis, right after dark probably. There you took a bus to Needles. At Needles you took a 'plane. Food was taken to your room as usual and Miss Price faked your chart and record for several days. When you had had enough time to go underground, the old doctor announced that you had wandered away."

He paused. The car bored on into the darkness for a long time. Finally she said with complete detachment, "Yes, you make good deductions, Mr. Warner. But something went wrong at Santo Espiritu—I've never known what. Dr. Whittemore—I grow up to call him Uncle Fred—thought he could give me three days at least. It turned out to be just a little more than twenty-four hours. It was Phoenix where I took the 'plane, not Needles. I was trying to get to Montreal. I got off the 'plane at Chicago. Before the other one left, the papers had me dead. I don't know what forced him to let it out so soon."

He prepared a barb. "You must know he's dead now. The publicity probably killed him. Miss Price has lived in hell ever since."

"He had angina. I think he wouldn't have agreed except that he knew he might die any moment and wanted me to have my chance." Her voice softened a little, then went hard again. "Eleanor Price was paid well."

For a moment some insight or hint of explanation glimmered at his nerves' ends, as when she had switched off the broadcast of war news, but it faded before he could take hold of it. "So Marta Penfield died in Chicago and Marie Royce was born and headed north. Why did you call yourself Marie Royce?"

"Royce was a name I saw on a saloon by the bus station in Milwaukee. I don't know why Marie. Well, my great-grandmother was named Maria. You see, on the bus I finally figured out what I could do, since I couldn't make Montreal. So I found out there was an N.Y.A. camp for poor girls, for derelict girls, near Waupun. I went there and they took me in. When I got pneumonia they nursed me. They taught me how to run a lathe. When I had learned that, they got me a job. The job at Petit Marais—with Jim. They were decent people."

Thus simply a mystery was dispelled. The N.Y.A. camp had been pure inspiration. All such places had been repeatedly searched for Marta Penfield, but the search had been conducted in a bland belief that Marta Penfield could not even know they existed. . . . The last few words had brought unevenness into her voice, which now sharpened and rose. "Marie Royce was decent too—she was a decent woman. I paid my way. I had a job and I did well. People liked me for myself. I had a home. I was decent as I hadn't been since I was a young girl. I believed in life again. So you had to destroy it."

He welcomed her vehemence for it was unguarded and might open further secrets. "I would have, but actually I didn't. You're forgetting why you left Petit Marais with me."

"Well, decency is destroyed and Marie is dead. So"—she added, in pain—"is Jim. He was in love with me, I think. He's dead. He never had what he wanted."

Instantly he said, "Was Dixon Gale your lover?" and, a split second later, cursed himself for a fool, for plunging much farther than it was yet safe to go.

Her scorn was almost tangible. "Is that what you want to know, Mr. Warner?"

"Not necessarily," he said with equal scorn. "You see, Mrs. Penfield—Marta—I'm fully as intelligent as you are. I know that no ordinary motive would have made you give up the life you led, wreck the lives of a dozen others, and take up your great masquerade. Quite clearly, your disappearing act came out of whatever happened at Silver-tip on the night of April 14, 1939."

"Your deductions haven't described that for you?"

"Not satisfactorily. They don't have to. For I know that you know."

He got no answer, and the car flowed steadily onwards behind its headlights through emptiness. She was a blanketed blur with a half-circle of light on her lap. Some miles farther, "That explains you adequately, Mr. Warner. I wonder why you tell me. Certainly not for any sentimental reason like decency or honour."

"No, purely as calculation," he said brutally. "And to show you how you can buy safety. Also, you think those thugs at Petit Murais came from your husband. That teaches me something, Marta, and also you're wrong. They were sent by your husband's proprietor, Taylor Damon."

She said coldly, "I hesitate to tell a master of deduction that he's wrong. But those men came straight from Gene Penfield."

"Then," he said quietly, "why do we have to get away from them?"

The silence of undiluted contempt was his answer. . . . An hour later he thought she had fallen asleep. Sometime after sunrise they came to Devil's Lake and ate breakfast, a very bad breakfast, at an all-night lunch-room. An indefinite time later a drizzle set in, which gradually quickened to a pounding storm. And as he drove into it, the fatigue which he had held off so far began to creep over him. His eyes grew intolerably hot, his hands seemed wired to the wheel, he could think of nothing except the dizzily flowing road. Worse still, a flicker of tinted light which appeared above his eyes meant that a migraine would disable him in about two hours. . . . A truck loomed out of the rain. He swerved tardily; brakes screeched; at the last moment he missed it, but the rear wheels skidded on the greasy pavement and the car careened for a hundred yards before he could bring it to a stop. He sat still, dazed. Marta's face was white.

"See here," she said quietly, "I know some things about escaping that you don't. We're both utterly exhausted. Getting some rest is more important than anything else. You see what happens to your driving. The same thing has happened to our judgment - exhaustion has made it undependable; we'll certainly make mistakes, and we can't afford to make mistakes. Surely there's some way of getting rest in safety."

She was right, and the risk, whatever it might be, had to be taken. A road-sign said that Minot was twenty miles away. Reaching it, he drove till he found a tourist camp that was off the highway and away from the centre of town. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hammond of Minneapolis registered. He carried their bags and blankets in and backed the car into the attached garage, glad that it had a door which could be closed. Bedroom, sitting-room, kitchenette. He got out a hypodermic needle and boiled it on the gas-range.

"Migraine," he said curtly. "Ergotamine tartrate. It will knock me out for an hour, then I'll be O.K. Can you give it to me?"

"I've given it to myself often enough,"

That humanized her, and it seemed gratuitous that she should have to deal with migraines as well as with Gene Penfield. But it was convenient, for she slipped the needle into his bared arm with the skill of a physician. He stretched out on the sofa and fell heavily asleep. . . . It was five o'clock when he woke. The headache was gone, his mind was clear, he felt invigorated. Marta was asleep in the bedroom, fathomlessly asleep. She had taken off her shoes, which somehow made her seem defenceless, and her face looked as soft and helpless as it had yesterday morning.

The lugubrious rain was still falling. He went down and after a wait got Phoenix by telephone. But too late. There was word that Mr. Cook was to call the toll operator at Sacramento. Phoenix and Sacramento—Irv was sticking close to the habitat of Marta Penfield. Sacramento had instructions for him to 'phone the *Morning Tribune* at Denver—where Tom Fetterman was. He did so and the city editor said yes, Irv was in Denver, and he'd undertake to get in touch with him tonight. Set an hour and 'phone him here tomorrow. . . . Angry and foreboding, Scott left the telephone office. Why Denver? The town would be full of Damon's people, gathering like buzzards at the old man's death-bed. Penfield might be there, perhaps even Damon. And the name of George Cook, now the name of a fugitive, had been joined with Irv's and left on record at a hotel in Phoenix, a telephone office in Sacramento, a newspaper in Denver.

He bought steak, lettuce, butter, a handful of magazines. At the 'Motel' Marta had rented an electric iron and was pressing her flannel suit. Her blue blouse, two pairs of stockings, and two trivial pieces of underwear, just washed, hung on a towel-rack. Somehow the sight of that household commonplace got under his guard, rousing an odd feeling which was almost pity.

"It was Marie Royce who learned to wash her stockings, wasn't it?" he said.

"There were over four years when the only feeling I had for Marta Penfield was contempt," she said, forgetful that he could instantly remember how long her marriage had lasted. "But I respected Marie. She learned a good many things besides washing stockings that I hadn't known. And, look—you don't want me to go downtown?"

"Nobody in Minot, North Dakota, ever saw my picture."

"Then go back and buy me a night-gown. That was what I forgot to bring. I'll broil the steak."

When he came back and she unwrapped it, she laughed with honest amusement. And that was the first laughter this queer journey had witnessed. "My dear young man—so much lace, so much bluishpseudosilk! What has your experience been, what kind of notions have you acquired? Marta Penfield was an aristocrat and Marie was a working girl. Something plain, something serviceable."

"Hell," he said, "it's the first one I've ever been called upon to buy. Anyway, I thought to get soap flakes for your washing."

It was the damndest evening. Dinner was a pleasant meal and

afterwards they were at ease and relaxed, as if the 'Motel' held pressure back, as if for a time there had ceased to be any urgency. He studied the road-maps he had procured, memorizing hundreds of miles of alternative highways. Rain beat on the roof, and Marta Penfield, bare-legged and with some life showing in her cheeks again, half-reclined on the sofa, a table-lamp making high lights on her cheeks and hair. He had come to understand her strength; it was an ability to accept the fact. She met what came. Thus in this unbelievable setting, this mad combination of circumstances, she accepted the fact, rested, and read magazines.

And he found a clue. He went out to the car to listen to a late-news broadcast, depressed by the vagueness of communiqués about the fighting in the Solomons. When he came back, she looked up and said, "The war means a lot to you, doesn't it?"

The war means a lot to you. Politely, carelessly, almost airily! That shone a light deep into the personality of Marta Penfield.

Later, laying aside her magazine, she swung her legs under her on the sofa, clasped her hands behind her head, and looked at him. "I'm grateful to you for this evening. You haven't cross-examined me or battled with me. It has been peaceful. . . . You couldn't possibly understand what peacefulness meant to me at Petit Marais. . . . I like this rain on the roof. I like the quiet and remoteness, and this town hasn't seemed hostile. For three hours I managed to forget that I'm responsible for Jim's death and that we're running for our liberty."

"And our lives."

"Even if they came from Taylor Damon?"

"Especially if they did."

She sat motionless. Then she shrugged and stood up. She began to spread blankets on the sofa. "If this lasts much longer it would be housewifely to buy sheets." With a gasp, "Do you intend to give me any hint how long it's going to last?"

"That has been taken out of my hands. It depends on a good many things. On the police. On Damon. On you. On my own gang of well-bred and intellectual thugs."

She shrugged again and said, "I take it you don't object to the sofa." She turned to look at him, entirely without expression.

That amused him; he smiled and said, "You needn't lock your door."

She was meditative. "I haven't had a companion in masquerade before—I may have to be told what some of the conventions are. . . . I'm not afraid of you. Even if I were, I would still understand that there's only one way I'm important to you." Finally she smiled too. "When I was at St. Anne's School, whoever got the bedroom also got the first bath. Good night."

He went on memorizing maps and through an unlocked door could hear Marta Penfield, that heroine of mystery tales, drawing a bath and splashing in it. How many millions of readers, how many hundreds of investigators, would be electrified if they knew that their

dead heroine, the famous beauty, the hero's wife, was now sought for murder and was spending tonight in a North Dakota tourist camp, with a writer of dull books on politics? In, he added with amusement, a night-gown which he had inexpertly bought for her. He found it harder than she did to accept the incredible. He lay awake a long time listening to the rain, analysing the probable moves of Wisconsin police and of Taylor Damon, wondering about Irv, examining the things he had learned about Marta Penfield and the more numerous things he had not learned.

In the morning the rain had passed and the air was clear and cold, with a feel of distant mountains and approaching autumn. Marta—fresh-faced at last, much younger, a red bandana round her head—looked out at one more strange town, said little, and helped him get breakfast. When he started downtown, she said equably, "Then you couldn't reach your well-bred and intellectual thugs last night?" His was not the only thinking mind on this expedition.

He got Irv Barney in Denver at last and there was comfort in hearing that tired, cynical voice. "North Dakota, huh? I take it you're honeymoonin' with your gun moll—that's what we worked out, anyway. And this is Mr. Henry Hammond? You certainly use up calling-cards. Who your friends have been anxious about is George Cook. It's an anxiety they been sharin' with the police."

"They've connected him with her, have they?"

"Even I could, even in Denver," Irv moaned. "Yeah, you're advertised for, son. Both of you—together."

"Well, for heaven's sake, put somebody to work back in Wisconsin. Find a big Pole who looks like a prizefighter and a little rat from Broadway's sub-basement."

Irv said, yeah, he hadn't really thought that his old friend George was a criminal, and by now Morris had got somebody to Wisconsin to protect George's interests. Probably by now, though, the Big Brain's agents would be a thousand miles away. That is, if they weren't just two minutes behind Henry Hammond himself. Probably Henry Hammond—he always called him Hank, Irv said—probably Hank Hammond understood by now that all their pretty little expectations had got just a trifle blown to hell. Well, Hank bein' looked for and in possession of some extremely hot goods, he probably had to keep right on goin'—if he could keep on. As for this scandalous intimacy with another man's wife, and his dead wife at that, how far had he got, how much had he learned?

"I've learned that our thesis about the night of April 14, 1939, is absolutely dead-sure right," Scott said savagely.

Irv grunted. "Oh? . . . It's worth a cop or two, then. You got that signed on the dotted line by the lady in question and duly attested by a notary?"

"Well, no. So far all I've got is a moral certainty."

"That sounds more like it. They don't pay off on moral certainties."

"I'll get the signature damned soon." He added honestly, "Apart from that, the truth is I could have found out just as much sitting in Morris's penthouse."

Irv's high irritating cackle was borne by the miracles of communication all the way from Denver. "Remember me tellin' you about the boy who asked Santa Claus for the volcano and got it?"

Scott briefly outlined the last four days, summarized his ideas, asked his questions. Irv reported that Denver was full of the Big Brain's lice waiting for Fetterman to die. No, he didn't think he'd been spotted yet but he would be. No, the Big Brain apparently wasn't here. Well, he was a political writer after all, wasn't he? He'd come here because he thought he'd better. He didn't like to say why. . . . Scott cursed the inadequacies of telephones.

"That nurse," Irv said, "she just ain't. She's gone underground—just like all of us. Maybe she's been helped. Sure, I know some things. I think maybe I got spotted in Nevada. We've got to get together, son. Let's be clear about this: we got to. I been wonderin'. How fast could you get to Hitchcock?"

Hitchcock, Wyoming. The maps he had memorized sketched routes. Williston—Miles City—Billings. Or Williston Miles City—Sheridan. "Two full days."

"You go there, then. I'll be waitin' for you if I can. If I can't, you wait for me."

"Just sit there with a lady and wait? Wait for you or for the cops?"

"You know," Irv said thoughtfully, "I can imagine situations where you'd be glad to make the acquaintance of the cops."

Scott exploded, "For goodness' sake don't be cryptic."

"I've kind of got to lookin' back over my shoulder," Irv admitted. "Well, I'll get there fast as I can after tomorrow. And I think Hitchcock is just Half-way House. Looks like one of us or all of us might be movin' on to the millionaire's palatial mountain lodge—or near by, anyways. I think a lot of the Big Brain's lice are convergin' there—like they been summoned. And look, son. Put your mind back to that week-end flight to Natal. What if there were three people went on it and only two come back?"

"Who was the third?"

"That," Irv said delicately, "is what you choke or charm out of them proud lips you're travellin' with. Yeah, and who is Professor Idsu, late of Berkeley?"

Scott searched his memory. "Never heard of him."

Irv's lazy voice turned savage for a single moment. "Wring that wench's neck if you have to but find out what she knows about him. He's connected with that Natal trip. Yeah, and some trip to Portland, too. Just before the end. You get it." Then the voice went lazy again. "Well, on to Hitchcock. I hope you get there—I hope I do too. And keep your purpose high, son—be moral—we all know that's a pretty shape you got with you, but don't let it lure you from duty's path."

Irv broke the connection and Scott swore at him. . . . Little enough, but what there was of it was all disquieting. Eleanor Price had disappeared, with Irv's clear conviction that she was dead. The police knew that he was with Marta. Therefore Damon did too. Not necessarily—the police didn't know who George Cook was and probably Damon didn't either. Irv was upset and apprehensive. And why meet in Hitchcock? And why Silvertip? Scott plunged into a morose conviction that the game was lost.

It was not lost!—not while he still held the ace of trumps. . . . At the tourist camp the ace of trumps had finished her ironing and packed the car, and was sitting on a bench in the sun, talking to a woman in high heels and yellow slacks, whose children were playing in the courtyard. She called, "We're all ready to leave, dear," in a melting voice and languished at him. She shook the woman's hand. "Good-bye, Mrs. Stevens. I'll remember—the Palace Auto Court, at Great Falls. Thanks so much!"

Relaxing in the seat beside him, a trim young woman on tour, she said, "It's almost as if we were tourists. It seemed quite natural to pack the car and start out."

He headed towards U.S. 2 in bright morning. "Well, admire the scenery and keep an eye peeled for souvenir stands," he said harshly. "And for cops too."

She turned frivolous. "I'm sure it will turn out that you went to college with the cops. . . . Where did you go to college, Mr. Warner?"

"Amherst, 1930."

"Then of course you're a Deke."

"And later on, to Harvard. I studied anthropology. It was amusing," he said, annoyed. "That was before I became a master of deduction. Who is Professor Idsu?"

"He was at the University of California. A rich man, an art collector, an authority on Asiatic art. He went back to Japan."

"What did he have to do with that flight to Natal?"

"Nothing at all," she said indifferently, not even interested.

"Nothing?"

"Not a thing."

"What did he have to do with a flight to Portland?"

"Portland?" She looked at him puzzled. "There wasn't any flight to Portland." Then her forehead wrinkled and she turned away. "Portland—Portland?" He saw her face harden with concentration and slowly turn pale. Her lips moved. He thought they formed the words, "Oh, my God!"

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOLEMN YOUNG MAN WHO COVERED HOSPITALS FOR THE *Denver Morning Tribune* had said, "Fetterman's got pneumonia now." In a few minutes Irv Barney stopped trading lies with the amusing grey-

beard who doubled as mining editor and radio editor and went out. He walked fifty yards down Broadway, then snapped his fingers and turned back. A man stopped to look at a window of a sporting-goods store and Irv lounged up beside him and studied tennis-rackets, golf-clubs, badminton-nets, bathing-suits, lawn furniture, with a sunny and detailed interest. Regretfully he looked at his watch and held up a finger to a taxi at the kerb. "Fontenelle Hospital," he said, after it got started. He saw his pal who was interested in golf find another taxi and nodded cheerfully. "So I'm a political reporter," he muttered, sitting back to enjoy a long drive in a brilliant mountain afternoon.

It was a prideful new hospital with yellow marble and a lot of chromium in the lobby, and it was as uncommunicative as all hospitals. Irv rode back towards the centre of town but, on impulse, stopped at a little park. He stretched out in the shade of some shrubbery and enjoyed the rainbows formed in lawn sprinklers for half an hour. The backdrop of distant peaks had its merits, and Denver would have been a good town if you didn't like New York. Deciding that he had been annoying enough, he caught another taxi and drove to an office building. The doctor's waiting-room had a number of patients in it, but Irv informed the girl that his scar had opened up and she agreed that his appointment came first. He said he'd send her tickets.

He had never succeeded in amusing the doctor, who now said curtly that, yes, a paralysed man could have pneumonia, that pneumonia was the merciful, terminal disease of the aged, and that Senator Hetterman was going to die. He called Irv a damned newspaper ghoul and would make no prediction whatever, saying he supposed Irv's obit would be as current one day or another. Irv went out and perceived that his uncommunicative friend followed him to a bank, where he changed some bills for the heavy metal used as money in these parts, and on to his hotel, where, alone at last, he stretched out on his bed and gave himself over to thinking thoughts that had no comfort at all in them.

He looked longingly at the telephone and could not doubt that even when he asked room-service for a highball that fact was duly reported to interested parties who paid well for the information. All the facts were hard: that Scott Warner and his diamond necklace were somewhere on the road between Minot, North Dakota, and Hitchcock, Wyoming; that pneumonia, the terminal disease of the aged, did not last long; that Irv Barney had to be in Denver and had to be in Hitchcock even more; that he could not do anything in Denver or even depart for Hitchcock without being observed; that, finally, this was the clutch. The boys on the other side of the fence overlooked nothing and took prompt measures. 'Yeah, efficient--they read a book on office management,' he told himself. 'So efficient that he might as well be living in a goldfish bowl. He and Scott should have travelled as a pair. Yeah. There was nobody within more than two thousand miles that Irv Barney could trust. The hell there wasn't. The fact that he was trying to dodge was just this: there was one person he could trust who was a lot nearer than that.'

He faced that fact at length. Finally he went out and spent twenty minutes sedulously changing from street-car to taxi and getting out of taxis and walking through buildings and getting into other taxis and more street-cars. Satisfied, he drove to the telephone building and put in two calls and waited for them in a green closet with a red bench in it. It took half an hour to get Morris Stein's apartment and Morris wasn't there. Irv indulged himself with a blow-up, left the single fact of Fetterman's pneumonia to be conveyed to Morris, and spent another half-hour in his smoke-filled cell till war-clogged circuits cleared enough for him to get Colusa County, California. Minute by minute he despised himself more.

He could fairly see the olive trees and roses, the black-and-white setter, the line where her light yellow hair met her tanned neck, when her surprised voice warmed in answer to his name. "To help out a heel who's in a jam, could you take the six-o'clock or the ten-o'clock 'plane out of Sacramento to Denver?" he said.

"Irv! Why?" Ann Sloane said.

"I'm in trouble, honey, and if I don't get help fast I'll be in worse trouble."

She was a pleasant girl with pretty eyes and a nice voice, and she had had a hell of a bad break, which he now proposed to make worse. Concern came into that nice voice and clearly she was sorry that Irv Barney was in trouble, but she was even more bewildered. Oh, hell!

"Well," he said reluctantly, "I'm a bum flag-waver, but let's say you'd be comin' on business of the United States. You know me and my pals haven't been turning over all that old stuff just because we're morbid souls. You know my chief pal——"

"You mean——"

"Yeah." Irv swallowed and plunged. "And remember the gal, I showed you her picture——"

"Marta Penfield," Ann said brightly.

"Yeah. Well, he's got her with him——"

"You mean she's alive! I don't believe it——"

"Damned alive. Maybe not permanently but for the time being. I promised to meet them. I even promised to meet them tomorrow. At Hitchcock, Wyoming. It's damn' sure I'm not going to be let keep that promise. That's going to be—embarrassing. And I'm waitin' for a man to die. And if he dies first——"

"I'll come," she said, her voice barely recognizable. "That is, if I can get a seat."

"I'm stayin' at the Bartlett Hotel. You'll get here in the morning. You go to the Marquis House and wait. . . ."

* * * * *

Sixty miles away, on the road to Colorado Springs, in his ranch-house headquarters, Taylor Damon at last confronted a man he had been waiting to see, a big, stupid bruiser named Peticic. In the vocation of Taylor Damon there was neither room nor use for men who failed at their job, but he had to see this one.

"Where's Berg?" he asked.

The big man shrugged and scowled. "We split."

"He's in Minneapolis. He didn't lose as much time getting in touch as you did. He's trying to find out where an Illinois station-wagon went after it got some hot Minnesota licence-plates. You probably don't know what I'm talking about."

"No."

"Neither did he. I want to know just two things——"

"We come back to this broad's house. This big ape from the machine-shop was there. Berg——"

"I want to know, first—was she the woman you were supposed to find?"

"She was the same broad in them pictures all right."

"Then why didn't you——"

"You couldn't at the foundry. I wanted to that night, but Berg he said he wasn't sure, he wanted to go back and take another look——"

"So you bungled it. There's only one thing more—who was this George Cook she went off with?"

"I never knew she did. I never heard of him."

Damon sent him away. . . . A good many personal qualities had combined to give Taylor Damon his power, but one was more important than all the others. He was able to face facts without any emotion whatever, and he was able to submit plans, hopes, and action to the complete domination of facts. The fact was that a supreme crisis had arisen. Everything had been endangered, including the life-work of Taylor Damon and the future of the United States.

On the one hand, Senator Fetterman would die within two days. On that death and on the appointment of Penfield hinged a plan for the organization of the world.

On the other hand, Marta Penfield was alive. She was with someone who knew who she was. This had to be connected with the man who had been probing into the records in Nevada. That man was very likely Scott Warner, and there must be some connection between Warner and him.

Penfield did not know his wife was alive. He must not know. Not while she remained alive.

On the one hand, Penfield; on the other, this group who knew and certainly were going to make use of their knowledge. . . . It was far too dangerous a situation to be confided to anyone but himself.

* * * * *

Coming out of the rest-room, Marta paused in the office of the petrol-station while the proprietor and Scott Warner checked the tyres. Her nerves did not jump when she saw, framed on the wall, a photograph of her husband. It was the most famous of the innumerable photographs that had been made of Eugene Penfield. It was "the bloody-bandage picture".

Five years ago, when he had flown the injured Dixon Gale out of

an Amazonian jungle in a wrecked 'plane which he himself had patched up. When that little 'plane, with one wing crumpled and the last teaspoonful of the last half-pint of petrol stuttering in the engine, had landed at Bogotá there had been a Press photographer on hand. ("Why didn't you get our wedding night photographed?" she had asked once. "All the rest of our honeymoon was in the rotogravures.") He stood beside the shattered cabin door, behind which Dixon Gale, his life-long friend, was unconscious and probably dying. The crude bandage round his head was caked with blood and grease. His face was gullied with strain and pain. But his head was thrown back—he was dauntless. It was the dauntless picture, the hero defying fate. So it had seemed to millions. So it seemed to the proprietor of a petrol-station in North Dakota. So it had seemed to her—once.

How many girls had dreamed of marrying that photograph? How many, as they drifted off to sleep, still dreamed of marrying it? How many other women had been, in reverie, the mother of that photograph, had seen their sons growing up to be the dauntless Penfield? How many little boys had seen themselves in that photograph? How many mediocre, incompetent, or broken men had seen in that photograph the man they might have been, the victory which life had never given them?

A familiar current of sick disgust passed through her nerves. Instantly a familiar, compulsive picture flashed into her mind. Dixon Gale's room at Silvertip, at three in the morning of April 15, 1939. . . .

That ancient friendship had been broken a month before—quite certainly when they made that sudden flight to Natal. (She knew now, through Scott Warner, who else had been on that flight.) They had been quarrelling when they got back, and they had gone on quarrelling ever since. (Now, through Scott Warner, she knew why.) That afternoon Professor Idsu had started home—to Berkeley. (Because of Scott Warner, she could guess what he had wanted.) Dixon arrived within an hour and must have met his car somewhere on the mountain roads. Within another hour she knew intuitively that the final break was here, the break which she had anticipated for a month, which Dixon had tried clumsily and mysteriously to draw her out about. Strangely, there was no other guest at Silvertip; there was not even one of Gene's new and ambiguous friends among the international rich. She had spent the afternoon wandering in the pine forest and the evening pacing her bedroom. Elsewhere that final quarrel was going on, but she was abandoned to the loathing and despair which had been her daily oppression for over a year. It was some hysterical prescience that had turned her, towards three o'clock, from standing at her window staring at the moonlit pines to running down the long corridor to Dixon's room, where that quarrel was going on. She was still short of it when she heard the shot.

He had turned towards her. That contorted face, for months on end, was going to invade even drug-induced sleep and wake her screaming. With the frenzy of murder in him, he seemed lustful of killing her too. But—this was what many hours of agony at Dr. Whittemore's

had brought her to understand—not even the frenzy of murder could dim Gene Penfield's sense of his own destiny. So with one hand over her mouth and the other twisting her arm behind her, he had said, not very wildly, "You won't drag me into a divorce court now. Your lover has killed himself. Or you've killed your lover. You can take your choice now, the White House or the gas-chamber." And hour by hour, in her room, he had coldly perfected the details of that trap, while she sank through hysteria towards insanity. Till morning, till servants were permitted to find the body of Gene Penfield's oldest friend. It was a simple, inexorable trap. Possibly that oldest friend had killed himself for love of his friend's wife. Or, just as well, a betrayed husband or a discarded mistress might have killed him. . . .

"What's the matter, Marta?" A stranger's voice shattered the picture. She realized that she was holding one hand across her mouth, that her feet were straining against the floor, that she was shuddering. That she was travelling with this stranger in a strange car in the inexhaustible sunlight of the Dakota wasteland.

"Too many pictures," she said shakily. "Don't worry—-I won't spill over. It never lasts long."

A little later "roadmen" waved them off the highway on a detour which led by increasingly bad going through ten miles of bare hills broken by *coulées*. Yesterday's hard rain had washed out the crude road in places and had made it a quagmire in other places. It was a dangerous road—as they found when they overtook an enormous six-wheel truck that was labouring up a slope ahead of them.

An arm thrust out of the cab commanded them to stop. The monster slid back for a distance, crawled upwards again, drifted towards the edge, was righted, careened in a scream of gears towards the top of the rise. At the crest the road curved sharply. She could see the driver fighting his wheel, and the front element of the truck made the turn. But the huge rear element ploughed straight ahead, whipsawing the cab, and everything slid sideways towards the edge.

Scott, who had begun to follow slowly up the slope, braked the car and leaped out. Marta slid behind the wheel and let the car glide backwards to level ground. Scott had climbed in the far side of the cab. He got the truck stopped exactly on the edge. It began to slide back towards her, stopped again, suddenly turned off the road entirely and started straight up the incline, bucked, vibrated, got to the top, stopped.

Scott came out of the cab and pulled the driver out after him, laying him on the ground. He beckoned to her and got in again. As she bent over the driver she saw the truck in motion, saw it make the road in safety and stop, then lean tipsily as a rear wheel collapsed.

Scott was back again, telling the driver, "Lie still, you fool!" and telling her, "Get the medicine-case." When she brought it, he was feeling the driver's arms and legs with a swift delicacy that surprised her. Many small beads of blood stood out on the driver's cheek, and his forehead was reddening from a long bump. Scott taped a gauze

pad to the check, felt a forcarm again, which made the driver wince, sat back and said, "You're O.K. But better lie quiet for a while."

"Where's a crap game, Doc?" the driver said with awed conviction. "My luck's in." He sat up. Scott shoved him down again. "Look, Doc, I ain't china and I got a living to make. I'm anyway two hours behind. And look at that wheel."

"If you want to take that load in yourself, you'll lie down for a while," Scott said. "I'll change your wheel."

And he did. "Your husband a trucker as well as a doctor, lady?" the driver inquired. "He isn't . . . a doctor," she said, and chatted easily, keeping him lying down. His name was Bert Hagen and his regular run was Hitchcock to Grand Forks but he had been given this special trip to Glasgow with a load of hardware for the dam. He was a big, chunky man who laughed easily and was fresh and pert, the type whom Marie Roycc had liked best at the machine-shop. Presently he was calling her 'sister' and letting his eyes enjoy her to the full. With due tribute to 'Mr. Hammond', who was plentifully begriming himself but getting the spare wheel on. "Tough for a skinny guy, ain't he?" Bert said, and Mrs. Hammond agreed that he was indeed tough.

Mr. Hammond got the new wheel on and the old one stored. Dirty and sweating, he came back to report, "The wheel is ruined but I think they can salvage the tyre."

"If they can't," Bert Hagen said, getting to his feet, "they'll retreat it with my hide."

Scott felt his arm again. "That wrist may swell. You'll have a pair of lavish black eyes by tomorrow. Keep that scraped cheek covered. If you get a headache—here." He took some pills from the medicine-case.

"Thanks, Doc." Bert Hagen shook hands, grinned at Marta with searching approval, and wished them a good vacation in Glacier Park. His horn saluted them when they passed him.

"You're very versatile, Scott," she said. "What parts of your past qualified you to practise roadside medicine and repair big trucks?"

"I was improvising—I've had to improvise this whole damned journey. That Good Samaritan instinct is dangerous. It might ruin us altogether. But what can you do? It *is* an instinct." He pondered in silence, then looked at her with something accusing in his eyes. "Yes, and it might save us too. Remember that it really is an instinct, Marta."

Regaining the highway, they came presently to the town of Williston, where he scraped the mud and grease off his clothes and they ate lunch.

"You're leaving U.S. 2?" she said, when they started again and he turned southward.

He said curtly, "We're heading for Hitchcock, Wyoming." The name meant nothing except that Bert Hagen had said he lived there. Well—it meant that Scott Warner had been told

to go there on one of those telephone calls. Hitchcock, Wyoming, was the place where her captor was taking her. Violent resentment swept over her, anger at her helplessness, at anyone's having power to control her. This had ceased to be a man who was sharing escape with her, he was another enemy. Scrutinizing his impassive face, she could see nothing that promised kindness or mercy. Well, Hitchcock was also the place where their final struggle would come. She thought with hypnotic fascination of what she had seen in his medicine-case.

"Here it comes," Scott Warner said.

She had vaguely noticed a highway patrolman coming towards them and passing them. Now, glancing over her shoulder, she saw that he had turned his motor-cycle round and was coming back. Her breath caught and held; she forced herself to let it out. The patrolman came up and waved them to the side of the road. Scott stopped. Be casual! She opened her bag, got out the compact, and studied her nose in its mirror. But she saw the policeman unbuckle the flap of his holster as he came towards them.

"Mind if I have a look at your registration, mister?" he asked mildly.

Marta patted the powder-puff on her nose and picked up a lipstick. Scott said, "Sure, but I wasn't speeding," opened the door, and got out. Half a mile away was the Missouri River, everywhere were tumbled hills with black cedars on them, and nowhere was any sound or any movement. Vast silence, vacancy, and perhaps the end. She made up her lips and saw Scott Warner's back and shoulders. Skinny and tough, the truck driver had said, and she suddenly knew that in this suspended moment this skinny and tough young man was prepared to jump the policeman. Her pulse skipped and shook. With care and precision, she completed the curve of her lips.

"All right," the policeman said, handing back the registration. He slowly studied the car. "Oh, do hurry, Henry!" Marta said fretfully. "If you make mespend another night on the road . . . !" The policeman transferred his attention to her. Quickly she flipped her skirt back and straightened her stockings, then met the policeman's gaze with a cheaply flirtatious smile. He grinned, waved them on, and went back to his motor-cycle.

Marta relaxed against the cushion, warmth coming back to her feet and fingers. A mile farther on Scott stopped the car. They faced each other, exulting; their hands met, clasped tight, clung. "You're perfect!" he said. "If ever I heard an aggrieved wife! Oh, instantaneous and perfect! And that bit with the skirt!"

She laughed in an ecstasy of relief. "I've learned that they won't waste time studying your face if you give them a knee to study."

The moment of delight was as brilliant as the sunshine and they shared it perfectly. She said, "You looked formidable, Scott. What would you have done . . . if?"

Amusement went out of his face like a light switched off. "I'm still improvising," he said. "The only clue I've got a good grip on is:

Go straight ahead." That, she had come to understand before now, was the resolution that charged every cell of his body. "That cop was looking for an Illinois station-wagon with George Cook and a murderess in it," he added. "He was satisfied with a Minnesota registration. The next one may be more thorough. He may want to look at the engine number—they've certainly got that from Chicago. If that's on his mind, we won't distract him with a glance at a graceful knee."

Thus he whetted the edge which both of them had been able sometimes to forget on this fantastic trip. He made them fugitives again. He started the engine. "We've got to abandon this car. But we can't walk to Hitchcock, and where would we buy another one? We'll have to get off highways and stick to roads that nobody would ever patrol. . . . We've got gas for three hundred miles now—we'll keep filling up at every chance. It would be nice to know what Montana back-roads are like."

"We can't keep going for ever," she said passionately, "and why Hitchcock? Aren't you ever going to tell me what you intend to do with me?"

"I'll tell you this. You can always see a road cop coming. Unless luck loves us, we won't see Taylor Damon's boys first."

Her mind, like the car which nosed off to a gravel road at the first fork, veered off into side issues. The country grew rougher, more broken and desolate, and she kept trying to piece together such small items of knowledge as she had got from him and to match them with her guesses and her dreads.

A long time passed in silence before she said, quite impersonally, "I don't see why you don't simply turn me in. Why didn't you tell that policeman I was Marie Royce? Marie would soon be identified as me. Why won't that do the whole job?"

"What job am I trying to do?"

"Rake up all the old frenzy again. You think Gene Penfield's reputation can't stand it. You think another blast of headlines will stop him for ever. You think you can keep him from being—well, President, isn't it?"

He said, "At the moment, Tom Fetterman's successor in the Senate." Beside the gravel road a sign marked the Montana boundary. He pointed to it, then said, "That was the original idea—when we only had theories to go on. You understand it all right—a big stench now would keep him from being Senator. You can bet that his keepers see it too. Well"—his face was empty of feeling—"I know now that it can be bigger than that. There's a bigger risk and a bigger stake. I'm shooting the moon."

"You won't tell me what it is?"

"Is there any reason why I should?"

"Of course not. . . . Meanwhile, whether you win or lose, I've lost altogether? My two years were just a kind of reprieve?"

Once more he stopped the car and faced her. "I've always known you were a beautiful woman, Marta, and you've abundantly proved

that you've got guts. It's pleasant to know there are beautiful women and I heartily admire the fight you've made. If life kept to the fairy-tales, you'd win, beauty and guts would do the job. You'd hit the ten-ring, you'd get the cigar. Well, there may be one chance in a million I can win my cigar without breaking your secret. If I can, that will be just fine. If not, I'll weep for you sincerely and throw you to the wolves." His voice got hard. "You see, those broadcasts you can't be interested in mean men getting killed, and while you tenderly cherish your privacy, your husband's gang of vultures——"

"You need violins for that," she said contemptuously, "or a spotlight on a flag and bombs bursting in air. Gene Penfield himself never sounded——"

"Okay, we'll skip it. The point is just this: undoubtedly you count like hell for yourself but you don't count at all." For fully half a second he smiled. "Let's take that up at Hitchcock. You've seen one agency that's interested in keeping us from getting there. Take my word for it, there's another."

* * * * *

By six o'clock Scott was willing to admit that they had gone wrong some time ago. For a while they had driven through ranch country, with the roads sometimes leading back to the Yellowstone River and an occasional truck or man on horseback meeting them. But since then they had been in badlands, and somewhere in those rust-red buttes they had got off whatever road led anywhere at all. He had followed dim, dusty trails along the base of cliffs, over divides, up *coulees*, through patches of cedar, and the trails had got steadily less like roads. He had no idea where they were.

Finally Marta said, "You're just a trifle lost, aren't you?"

She had been silent for at least two hours, and not the easiest part of the afternoon had been a steadily growing irritation. In a dozen ways, all of them irrational, she made him mad. "You complained to that cop about spending another night on the road, Mrs. Hammond," he said. "That's what it looks like, and I don't know how it's done in country like this."

"If you're not a Westerner, you simply pull off the road. If you are, you look for water. I'm a Westerner."

For another half-hour he followed the aimless trail across red earth. The buttes grew more twisted, and a vast red light began to envelop everything. Hills drew together and then the trail plunged between two gaunt needles and came out to cross a flat stretch and run in purple shadow along the base of gullied and pitted cliffs. These showed a minute opening, and Marta said, "Pull in there—maybe you'd better back in."

Fifty feet of corridor became something like a room five hundred feet across with steep walls on all sides. There was a clump of gnarled black cedars; there was a trickle of water from the base of one wall,

which flowed towards the opening but never got there; there were a few ancient logs and dried branches in the form of a lean-to.

"I thought so," she said. "They graze this country in good years. This was a line camp—oh, say three or four years ago. It's tonight's 'Motel'."

The petrol in the folding stove had been used up. She told him, reprovingly, not to disturb the lean-to, and he dragged cedar branches from the little clump. Marta got to work preparing supper and Scott piled up wood—"It will be ghastly cold tonight," she said—and unrolled the sleeping-bags he had bought in Bemidji. They had been intended purely as stage properties, but they came in handy now.

"I'm putting yours on the cot," he said, "the car will be your sanctuary."

"Last night you called me prudish, now you're uncomfortable at the thought of spending another night with me," she said derisively. "You keep telling me you're going to throw me to the wolves—really, Scott, I can't be afraid you'll turn into a wolf. I merely wish you'd provide a bathroom."

That annoyed him exceedingly—like all the rest of the afternoon. They ate supper—it almost exhausted their larder—in an incredible sunset which burned high clouds above their desert room a wild medley of greens, browns, and scarlets. Light faded through those colours and dusk welled up the rusty buttes and the firelight grew against it. She scoured the dishes and put them away, they spread blankets beside the fire and stretched out on them facing each other, the last light died in the zenith and the stars were out, one side of the car and a small circle of desert were in firelight, all the rest was darkness. With her capacity for repose, she was motionless and apparently without emotion. He also felt a tangible release, a sense that pursuit had been shaken off and for a few hours they were safe. But it was not wholly satisfying—he felt a dozen grudges against this woman and could not justify them.

Firelight was on her face. Her hair was incredibly neat—black as night, short bobbed and curled at the ends. Her relaxation was like a trance, except that she rolled over on her back and gazed at the stars. He would have given much to know what thoughts went on beneath her impassivity. She was wearing the blue sweater again, under her jacket, and the short skirt still showed no wrinkles. She was fully as beautiful as the legend had made her out to be, and that fact annoyed Scott Warner. He got up and switched on the radio, but could not find a news broadcast anywhere on the dial. "Get that again," Marta said from the fire.

It was a dance orchestra playing a poignant, sentimental song of a few years back. He identified it as 'Night and Day', and thought how ironical dance bands and silly songs were against a background of war. Marta found no irony in it, however, and he watched her face grow melancholy and then desolate. "Turn it off!" she said. She sat up; her face was agonized and her shoulders began to shake. Oddly moved, he sat beside her. "They buried Jim today," she whispered.

Scott took her hand, which squeezed his frantically, then put an arm around her shoulders. She shook and shook and could hardly speak. "I wasn't there . . . Gramp Potter was. And Swede Nelson and Clyde Gray. And all the rest. . . . All of them are sure I killed him." In the circle of his arm she twisted and shook. "They're right. I did. They'll hate me all my life."

"You didn't kill him, Marta," he said. "Just remember who did kill him."

Her voice came under control again, though small and hard. "What life ever touched mine and was the better for it?"

He laid his hand on her cheek. She put her own over it. Then she sat up straight and drew away from him. "I didn't know you could be gentle," she said.

More than a little awkward, he moved across the fire from her. "I didn't know you could be defenceless."

"I'm not—for very long. Get some more music. . . . Did you know I was a singer? When I was a young girl. At St. Anne's."

So for half an hour they listened to a string quartette playing in St. Louis, fifteen hundred miles away, heard in Montana night, under the sky in vacant space. Getting up to put wood on the fire, Scott stood in the darkness and again felt that sharp sense of the impossible. Marta Penfield lay on one side, her knees bent, her face cradled in an elbow on a cushion from the car. She had mastered herself again and her eyes were peaceful. The scene was without possibility, and here it was. . . . When the music ended he switched off the radio and the wilderness silence closed round them.

Except that it had one sound in it. "We must be near a ranch," he said. "Listen to the hounds."

She smiled with complete poise. "Tenderfoot! Those are coyotes."

His thoughts came back to her clothes. "You haven't had a chance to do your daily washing. And Henry Hammond is a poor provider. You need more clothes."

Her lips formed an eloquent sneer. "Do you have to costume me for the wolves? Just who are they? Newspapermen, or politicians, or the F.B.I.? Just who puts on the black cap and sentences me for the crime of having stayed alive for two years?"

The hard fact was that, till he joined Irv Barney, he wouldn't know. She went on, "I've been costumed for the Press innumerable times, so I can warn you not to repeat the mistake you made with that night-gown. The condemned won't look her best in furbelows and fripperies. I was a tall girl and I'm a tall woman. I walk well and my figure calls for extremely simple, extremely expensive things. Don't buy flounces or buckles or bows or clasps or beads. Just the line of the neck and shoulders and the uplifted chin. Give the camera an uncluttered background, and trust to make-up editors and the news sense of the American public."

Even her scorn was charged with self-reliance. And no camera

could improve on this picture of Marta Penfield in firelight, looking like her ancestors of Spanish California, her chin in a tapering hand, the length of her thighs emphasized by her posture, her face tranquil. He didn't answer her taunt, merely looked at her and wondered about the secrets behind those uncommunicative eyes.

Well, pawn to king's fourth. "All you need do is tell me—no, you don't even have to tell me what happened at Silvertip when Dixon Gale was killed. Simply tell me how I can find out what happened."

She sat up, in full firelight now. "So we start bargaining now! What are you prepared to pay?"

"There are ten thousand places like Petit Marais. You can run a lathe or keep books at any one of them."

"And be Mary Brown this time, perhaps." She laughed with an uprush of contempt. "You've broken that illusion for ever. So I don't think you've got anything to offer me that is worth anything at all."

"All right," he said, just as contemptuously, "I'll pay you an experience you haven't had too often—a feeling of having done a decent thing."

She got up to put a handful of cedar boughs on the fire and stood looking into it. She sat down again. "You explain things so well, explain why I seem to want justification in your eyes," she said, thoughtfully. He waited while the fire crackled and Marta Penfield deliberated things which he had too little chance of ever learning.

At last she said, from a great distance, "Whatever your theories have worked out, Dixon Gale and I were not lovers. He was Gene's friend and all he wanted was to be mine—and that's all I ever thought of his being. I needed a friend." One hand made a fierce movement. "That's the absolute mistake, to need friends. If you need friends, then you're naked to the hurricane. And if it's a fatal need, certainly I'm fatal to my friends." Her fierceness turned into brutality. "If you ever want to sleep with me, say so and run your chances. But if you find yourself in love with me or even wanting to be humanly kind to me, run like hell. It will cost you your life."

Scott Warner said nothing. She could not possibly be aware how much of her defences had crumbled. "I didn't mean to talk like a minor poetess," she said. She clasped her arms round her knees, staring at the fire. "There was nothing faked about my collapse. I went to pieces like a vase you've dropped—oh, an expensive and doubtless beautiful vase. You can see what a conflict that created for Gene Penfield. Should he have it advertised everywhere that the hero now had to shoulder another burden? Would an invalid and probably insane wife make him seem more Christ-like to the world's eyes? Or would that be a mistake? If it became known that the hero's wife had weakened, would the hero seem weaker? That fear won out. Everything that money and power could do to keep the secret was done. If you knew that I was at Santo Espiritu before the story broke, then you're almost a match for Gene Penfield."

He tried even to breathe softly. For her fettered emotions had broken free and at last he was beginning to get parts of what he had risked everything on. "Of course he knew that if the hero's wife should die, that could be converted to advertising. The hero would go on following his star, but everyone would see how lonely greatness is. . . . Well, I almost co-operated with him. For some months at Dr. Whittemore's, the best bet was I'd kill myself."

She remained coldly contemptuous of herself, but her breast rose in a long sigh. Finally she said, "I didn't," and lay back on her blanket.

When it was clear that she would go no farther on her own momentum, he said, "Sure, that cured you. But you could have divorced him any time." She merely looked at him. "Why didn't you?"

"Why hadn't I divorced him any time after I realized . . ." She veered away from that and said, "You don't divorce the hero—the man who has a star to follow. The man who is going to save America and lead it out of bitter darkness to sunlight of a new order."

"Why not?"

"At least, you decide that you don't, if you're wandering in the nightmare I was wandering in. . . . I'll tell you what cured me. I decided that it would be good to stay alive. So I stayed alive."

There was no more scorn or ice; she was vindicating herself. "That's what cured me—the knowledge that it's good to be alive, and I intended to be. And I've stayed alive. For two years. What can you possibly know about the triumph of being alive and free of fear and without shame? That's the triumph you shattered for me. What could you offer me that's worth a millionth of what you've ruined?"

There was powerful impulse to answer her passion with something just as violent. But he said casually, "I can offer you what you brag you've got but what you've never had. Two years free of fear? You're terrified of him this minute. You ran into the desert in terror, you're running in terror now, you'll run in terror all your life till you die of it. Unless you turn and face him."

Marta Penfield stood up, drawing him to his feet also. "That's your final offer, isn't it?—and it's just words. You think brave thoughts, you write fearless articles, full of absolutely uncompromising words. Well, I lived with him. What can you possibly know of the murderous will in a man like Gene Penfield? It's a drive for power, to be master, to be supreme. It's a drive to crush anything that stands in the way of his monstrous greatness—a wife, or a stranger's child, or a nation. He'll grow greater every day or he'll destroy whatever threatens to interfere. You're a man who writes brave articles—you wouldn't so much as twist my arm, and if you bumped into me you'd regret the rudeness. He would shoot me through the head. He would shoot you through the head. Or President Roosevelt. Or anyone."

His calmness broke up; he began practically to yell. "And you're so obsessed with your own damned contemptible being alive that

you've never understood that he's only a simple fool whom really dangerous men can use. If he had only his own half-ounce brain to guide him, only the retarded intelligence of a college athlete, he wouldn't be dangerous. Oh, he could scare a woman, maybe, or a photographer who had snapped the shutter before he got his hair tousled. But in the hands of someone who knows how to use public admiration—Taylor Damon, for one—he makes a *Gauleiter*."

"Taylor Damon's conspiracy has never been anything but moonshine——"

He cut her off. "I've seen some of its fools sent up for twenty years. Some good men have turned up missing because they didn't like it. Go to Denver right now and see its buzzards gathering while a good man dies and they get ready to put America's saviour in his place——"

"Taylor Damon is just a talkative and impractical fool, a crazy dreamer——"

"He's the most dangerous man in this country——"

She made a gesture of ineffable disgust. "You mean if he is driven to desperation he'll write a book! I tell you Gene Penfield knows he has a star and the fires of hell burn in him. Taylor Damon will write a pretty book—just like you—but Gene Penfield will shoot you through the head."

Three times : shoot through the head. There had ceased to be any doubt who shot Dixon Gale. Scott said mildly, "I promise you he won't shoot you through the head, if you'll tell me how Gale was shot. Or even why."

She looked him squarely in the eyes. "I wasn't there."

"Or who Professor Idsu is."

"I've told you. A mild, sweet scholar who has beautiful ivories and prints."

"And what he had to do with the Natal flight and the flight to Portland."

She shook her head. "I haven't got a story-book mind. I don't write articles and can't uncover conspiracies. Why don't you make it that Mr. Idsu had the bombsight, or was calling the fifth column together in masked robes, or was buying sabotage at Mare Island, or was offering Gene his vote for President in return for all the secret weapons you can imagine?"

"I see," he said. "Well, Marta, enjoy the company of the people it groups you with."

She pounced on that. "It doesn't group me with anyone. I've learned to take care to play it alone."

"Only the lice and the vermin. The discontented and the deluded and the treasonous. The little cells of dupes, the secret spies and the secret haters, those who stand to profit from defeat, the faint-hearted and the sick minds, and the maniacs."

"You'll economize emotion," he said, "if you'll realize that a woman who has spent a long time facing her own death has learned

one thing very thoroughly—that if you keep fighting back—alone—maybe you'll live."

"It would make a good slogan for the Solomons. Why not tell it to the Marines?"

"We aren't Marines." She was arrogant now. "We're a man who writes fearless articles and a woman who owes nothing to anyone. We're safe and talkative late at night in Montana, without even an editor shooting words at us."

"And you won't enlist on my side."

"Did you really think I would? Was there an idea I had a great soul?"

"Perhaps I didn't realize that anyone's life counted so much."

"It never does—in a movie scenario. . . . I'm going to bed. You'll have to do without your news broadcast. For that would be invading my bedroom, wouldn't it?"

She let that wholly unmotivated taunt hang in the air, and the door of the station-wagon banged behind her. . . . He sat pondering his failure till the fire sank so low that cold pierced through his jacket, then took off his shoes and crawled into the sleeping-bag. He was getting used to sleeping within a few feet of Marta Penfield. And to lying awake remembering that once the whole mystery was to have been solved and Taylor Damon hamstrung in forty-eight hours.

Turning over and over the items of that all-out battle of wills beside the fire, he found little that was usable. His pretty plans for using Marta Penfield had been founded on an ignorance so naive that it now looked idiotic. He could count on her for only what he could get by guile or force. And that was not going to be much unless he improved fast.

Well, he knew that Gale had not been her lover. He knew that Marta had intended to divorce Penfield long before Gale's death—but he had guessed that a year ago. He knew that she was in mortal terror of him—but he had always known that she must be, for she had pretended to die. But also he now quite certainly that Gene Penfield had murdered his friend.

Hell! He hadn't learned anything he hadn't been quite certain of long ago. . . . After starting sharply out of drowsiness several times, he fell asleep.

He woke to darkness and intense annoyance. It must be possible to make something of the certain knowledge that the Saviour of America had committed murder! The boast was that he had a mind. He'd damned well better begin using it.

Montana moaned with a piercing wind which shook the flap of his sleeping-bag and had blown some embers of the fire alight. He got up, put twigs on them, nursed them to a blaze, threw the rest of the logs on and stood close till he was warm, then sat down to use his mind. . . . Penfield had killed Gale. Shot him through the head. She had used those words three times; the iteration was indelibly stamped with fear. So indelibly that . . . She had said, "I wasn't

there." But she had been there. She had seen Gale shot through the head; that was the picture she could not erase. Scott was absolutely certain—and then, presently, he wasn't certain. She need not have seen it, she had heard it innumerable times. You could hate her and still understand that she had lived in hell. She need not necessarily have seen it.

He started, for something had moved. It was Marta—wrapped in a blanket. "I woke up," she said. She sat beside him, again a figure in firelight, her hair not so neat now, her stockingless feet in those tan walking-shoes. "I'm going to give you a piece of useful information. I don't believe in this giant of evil you've built Taylor Damon into. I don't believe he's dangerous to anyone. But I'll tell you this about him, if it matters: he's a coward."

"That's absurd," he said. "Damon is a possessed man, a fanatic, Cromwell or Lenin, any crazed prophet living on wild honey and driven by the cold demon of unadulterated thought. Men like that are never cowards. He's incapable of fear—because he's incapable of any emotion. He's never loved a woman. He has never been touched by a child's helplessness. He has never felt grief when a friend died. He has never felt anything, because he can't feel anything."

"I don't mean the kind of coward that a man like you would be if he were cowardly. I mean he's afraid to die—"

"Who isn't? I am—you've spent two years proving you are."

She shook her head solemnly. "No, I want to live—that's different. As an idea, death doesn't scare Damon; on paper, it's nothing at all. But pain terrifies him. I give you my solemn word. If you'll manage to convince him that you can make his nerves scream with pain, you'll be able to lick him altogether. . . . As," she added with deep solemnity, "you can't lick a brave man . . . like Gene Penfield."

Why had she come out into the darkness to say something so palpably absurd? He studied her curiously. She was shapely in that green blanket and almost ridiculous, except that her black hair framed her forehead as a fine painter might have made it do. Except that she somehow seemed to have a fragility and helplessness that contradicted everything he knew about her. The wind that was flattening the renewed flames of the camp fire suddenly twitched the blanket from her shoulder, a bare shoulder momentarily rose-coloured in the firelight with the strap of her brassiere. The exposure was certainly not excessive, but her face turned scarlet and she tucked the blanket back swiftly, clear to her chin, and withdrew her feet under it.

That made him laugh. "And you were calling me a prude! You're spending your fourth night with me and you're embarrassed when your shoulder shows." That got a smile, and he added, "You don't seem to know the technique of sleeping-bags. One wears one's clothes in them."

"Not when you've got to wear the same dress tomorrow. . . . I've slept in many sleeping-bags. In the mountains above Silvertip and many other places."

She went on staring at the fire. He could not begin to guess why she had come out with this theory about Taylor Damon. "Why do you tell me Damon's a coward? I don't believe it, but I wonder why you say so."

Her lips changed. A smile made them tender, then they wore the mild derision which he knew better. She looked at him in this odd amusement, then suddenly leaned against him, a hearty weight, most palpably alive. "Yes, and if I threw myself in your arms, you'd conclude I was making a different kind of bid for—oh, call it my freedom. Trying to buy safety with what they used to speak of as a woman's virtue. Well," Marta said impersonally, "you'd be right. I'd make that offer in a minute if it had any chance, and I think there are men who'd close the bargain. But not you."

She sat upright again, moving away. His shoulder retained a lively memory of the soft solidity of hers through a thickness of blanket. Again that momentary smile while she looked at nothing in the fire. "Why? Because you would rather destroy Damon than anything else in the world. I don't understand why, but that's what you want to do with your life. If I can help, I want to."

She hugged the blanket round her knees, though it was probably immodest that her shoes were showing again, and said, "Four nights ago we left Petit Marais. I've felt a good many emotions in that time. It has been a nightmare. But"—she looked at him steadily—"not like the nightmares I've had to live in before this."

"Sometimes it has been a vacation in a peace-time world."

She nodded. "You're a maniac, Scott. A madman. So absolutely determined to do what you've started out to do that you've burned all the bridges, scuttled all the lifeboats, and thrown away everything you can't use to the one end. You'll keep after it till you're killed for it. . . . I've known madmen before. What's strange in the experience," Marta said slowly, "is knowing one whom I have to respect."

It was a beautiful voice, deep contralto and rich with overtones, gently pitched and clear. It was music in the night, and then there was the crackling of the wind, and that now familiar feeling of the immeasurably strange surged up in it. Marta felt it too. "This particular pair of people, in this impossible place, after all these impossible events—it simply isn't believable." A bare arm came out of the blanket and she took his hand. "I wish I could find meaning in the things you say, Scott. I can't. I wish I believed things. I don't. I wish I were otherwise than I am. I'm not. . . . If the world made better sense, you and I would be on the same side. After spending four nights with you, I could like that. . . . You'll break me in two if it turns out that way, and I know it. I'll run all your hopes into the ditch if I can, and you know it. . . . Well, nevertheless, as much as a person can be who you're sure is rotten with neurosis and corrupt with egotism, I'm reasonably grateful to you, Scott. Being grateful to anyone is a new experience for me. On the other side of Jordan, I'll try to make

you some return for it. Maybe you will save the world and make it decent. If you do, break my privacy again and take me to dinner."

She squeezed his hand hard and stood up. He walked beside her to the car. She got in. "Good night again," she said.

"Good night, Marta," he answered, and the door closed behind her.

CHAPTER FOUR

YOU CANNOT RUN THE WORLD BY LONG-DISTANCE TELEPHONE. THIS basic fact is known to the heads of sales organizations and the executives of Washington bureaux. It was beginning to be appreciated by certain persons in and near Denver, Colorado.

A toll operator whose office was in Colorado Springs reported, "Mr. Penfield is not at home. They can't set a time when he will be home. Do you want me to keep the call on file?"

Taylor Damon said, "No. Just remember how you get Silvertip." You got Silvertip, at the other end, by fifty miles of Forest Service wire and ten miles of Penfield's.

Eugene Penfield had not been home when he tried to get him late yesterday. His card-catalogue mind flashed the information that the grouse season had opened yesterday. In preparing the United States for a government which would be strong where democracy was weak, he nevertheless had to allow for the stupid pleasures of simple-minded millionaires. While an exquisitely calibrated plan hung poised waiting for death to make him Senator, Penfield was probably shooting grouse.

Damon returned to a calculation as impersonal as mathematics. The man who was with Marta Penfield was a kind of X. He did not know who X was. Therefore he had to assume that X intended to use Marta Penfield against Penfield or, which was much less likely but must be considered, against Damon. He had to assume that X was a personal enemy or, less possibly, a political enemy of Penfield's. He had to assume that X's purpose was to damage Penfield as much as possible. It was a situation so dangerous that it might wreck this plan and ruin Penfield's usefulness. That implied that X was taking her either to Silvertip or to some near-by place from which Penfield could be easily reached.

Damon must intercept them somewhere along the way. He himself, for the job could be entrusted to no one else. The woman must be got rid of before Penfield could be told that she was alive.

He assumed that they would travel only by night, and probably in disguise. X would be afraid of the police and of the woman's being recognized. Damon had calculated their probable rate of travel. He had reduced the likely routes from Duluth to two. The distance, the time, and the rate of travel proved that they must now be approaching Wyoming. He would go to either Cheyenne or Hitchcock, procure someone for the more distasteful aspects of the job, and wait for the

rate of travel to bring them within reach. . . . It was all as inevitable as algebra. There remained only to determine whether they were coming by Hitchcock or by Cheyenne.

However, he must consider a possibility, though it was an exceedingly small one. More than he had deduced might be involved, it might be part of something. There was the small possibility that X had some connection with someone. The likeliest would be Scott Warner, on whom he had had no report in more than a month.

He 'phoned Denver. "What did Irv Barney do yesterday?"

"Hotel. Hospital. *Denver Tribune*. A long time at the Marquis House. He was there for two hours this morning, too."

"Who with?"

"I don't know."

"Find out."

"How?"

"That's up to you."

There was the possibility that Scott Warner was up to something—that he had some connection with X. That those meetings with Barney in New York had had some bearing on the dangerous situation. That would be extremely bad. For, serious as Marta Penfield's being alive might prove to be in any event, Scott Warner was the man who, above all others, knew how to make use of the secret. This was an infinitesimal possibility, but he had to consider it. . . .

In a room on the eighth floor of the Marquis House, Irv Barney reduced a sheet of writing-paper to sixty-fourths. Nothing had been written on it, it was the last sheet in the desk, he had torn all the others to the same small squares. "Even if I was a good conspirator I wouldn't want to be. Even if I was a leadin' political prophet, I'd hate prophesyin'," he lamented. "I want to give up the conspiracy business. I want to go to Colusa County and grow peaches." He got up to limp about the little room. "I got a game leg, my bruin limps worse, I miss my assignments and bust my big stories, I'm thirty-nine years old—"

Ann Sloane, tanned and grey-eyed and politely interested, said, "That doesn't leave much except peach-growing—"

"Try not to spoil a guy's climaxes, honey. I was sayin', I can't justify it, it ain't right nor tolerable, and here goes." He took her face in his hands and kissed her. With remarkable promptness she stood up for more effective co-operation and he repeated the intolerable. "You cur, Barney!" he said hoarsely. "Well, I've bust everything so fur, I'm the master-mind they played for a sucker and made good, but at last I've done something I wanted to."

A bright crimson had come to underlie her tan. "I can't help thinking that if you would come to Colusa County you could do that—well, quite often."

Irv sat down to study her cheeks and eyes, her small figure, the toes of her shoes, the wave in her hair—and growled. "You turn those eyes the other way or master-mind's last feeble idea will get ditched."

Those two 'plane flights, they're the answer—they got to be. Natal and Portland. It's a million to one he wasn't quarrelin' with Penfield over Marta, honey. All this time you been wrong, you been doin' him an injustice."

"So you keep saying. Irv, the truth is—well, I don't seem to care—"

"You say there was three of them on that Natal flight. The whole record says just Gale and Penfield. Somebody lied plenty. Stein, he gets it Idsu was tied up with Weidemann and Hohenloe—that gang. Look, Ann, its A.B.C. and what are we scared of? Why don't we use our head and jump to conclusions?"

"You've jumped. You think Professor Idsu got them to fly somebody out of the country. Somebody so important that Dixon got killed and nobody ever dared say a word."

"If anybody had, then the hero would land in Leavenworth. Nobody ever got elected President out of Leavenworth. That's why that poor dope Gale got shot. . . . Honey, you got to know more, you got to remember more. You've got to. And me, I got to get to Hitchcock. That dame is there and she knows the answers. If I was there, between the three of us we could put the squeeze on her." Irv brooded. "Yeah, and that poor ape Scott sittin' there with a handful of dynamite and wonderin' why in hell I don't keep my promise. Or, anyway, why in hell I don't 'phone him. And any bell-boy or any newsboy in Hitchcock can spot her any minute. Game called the minute that happens. Yeah, and game called the minute old Tom dies."

"You want me to go to Hitchcock, don't you?"

"No! Don't go touchin' pitch. And I don't want the Five Points Gang to get sight of you, neither."

"But you think that if you start to Hitchcock, somebody will stop you."

The intention was to laugh derisively and stare her down, but it didn't get very far. Staring at her brought back thoughts of peach-growing. They resulted in the same action as before. It was well received. "Oh, lord," he whispered above her yellow hair, "there you go, side-trackin' me. Darling, your taste in men is just low. Leave me alone!" He shoved her almost to arm's length. "Get homely, darling, or how do I do my thinkin'? I tell you, this is where we got to think."

"Well," she smoothed the yellow hair, "I'll try it for, say, five minutes."

He should have called the *Tribune* half an hour ago. He called it now . . . and this time it was the works. He put the 'phone back. He sat down. "We pick damn' queer times for our love scenes, Ann. Game's been called. Old Tom's dead. That licked us. It was a nice idea, it was a downright pretty idea, sittin' on our tails in New York. But crazy. As crazy as we were for thinkin' it would work out. So we're licked."

Denver and the Marquis House were cold with failure, and Irv Barney had no love for being licked. Or looking like a fool. Or having the other side coast in under wraps. He felt old, he felt sick, he felt sore. Ann thrust her feet out in front of her and stared at them. So did Irv. "Why are we licked, Irv?" she asked. It was the first time she had said 'we'.

"Hell, darling, if Tom died an hour ago, Custer named Penfield to succeed him in the Senate fifty-six minutes back. Maybe fifty-nine."

"It comes down to this: Murta is alive. Doesn't it?"

"Yeah," Irv said. He said, "No!" loudly. Then he said, "Yeah. . . ."

In another Denver room—he had come up from Colorado Springs two hours ago—Taylor Damon was on the 'phone. It took a long time, and at last the operator reported, "Your party is not at home." Damon said quietly, "There's a Judge Sumter there. I'll speak to him." Damon was alone, his immediate staff were in the next room, but if they had been here they would have seen only a man tranquilly waiting to speak to a friend. Finally the voice of Judge Sumter—ex-Congressman, two thousand miles from home—came over the wire.

"Where's Penfield?"

"I'm damned relieved to hear your voice. We're seriously concerned—we're badly scared. He went out yesterday morning. He hasn't come back."

"Where did he go?"

"We don't know. We've . . . tried hard to find out."

"Hunting?"

"No. Down the mountain. Alone. In a car."

"Hold everything. You'll hear from me. He's to 'phone me here—at Denver."

He broke the connection before Sumter could complain. When the unforeseen happens, you must act. It had taken half an hour to get Silvertip but he got Governor Custer in three minutes. "You've had the flash?" he said.

"Yes."

"Hold everything. Make no statement. When they ask whom you're appointing, your line is that there is plenty of time. You have no intention of being rushed into a decision."

He went into the outer room. The cold fact was that something unforeseen had occurred. That the whole plan had been brought in jeopardy. That it might be necessary not to appoint Penfield. From the beginning, everything had hung on its being done at once. Before there was time for public feeling to bring itself to bear.

There was no time at all. Time had been used up.

"Penfield has chosen this particular moment to get beyond reach," he said quietly. "I may have to go myself. If I do, Custer is to go ahead the moment Penfield reports himself. I'll try to run everything by 'phone."

Penfield had to be found. Marta Penfield had to be found. At

once. What did 'at once' mean, actually? Forty-eight hours. Damon could save everything, within forty-eight hours. Or Penfield could ruin everything, if forty-eight hours passed without his reporting. But Marta Penfield could ruin everything in five minutes. She came first.

While computing times, he had been leafing through memorandum-slips. One said, "Party Irv Barney calling on at Marquis House named Ann Sloane." His index-card mind instantly identified Ann Sloane as Dixon Gale's fiancée. Ann Sloane and Irv Barney together—Barney in Denver waiting for Fetterman to die—someone at Oasis, Nevada, where Marta Penfield was supposed to have died—Barney and Scott Warner together in New York—Warner lost sight of—an unidentified man with Marta Penfield travelling in the direction of Silvertip.

Too much was unknown for him to work out whatever was being attempted. But there could be no doubt. All these things were related. The infinitesimal possibility was proved to be the actual fact. He had underestimated the danger. The danger was immediate and it was total. And Penfield had got out of reach, Fetterman was dead, and time had been used up.

* * * * *

For both Scott Warner and Marta Penfield the thirty-six hours at Hitchcock had been a period of steadily increasing, intolerable tension. But though Marta was as taut as a violin string she was also electrified by the knowledge that something had gone wrong with his plans.

They came into Hitchcock in early afternoon, after passing miles of the oil-derricks that had made it a boom town. It was full of bunting and gunfire, for this was Old West Week. Every Hitchcock male was wearing whiskers, genuine or *crêpe*. Everyone was wearing what was intended to be an old-fashioned costume—frock-coats, hickory pants, hair pants, coon-skin caps; sun-bonnets, hoop skirts, Indian shawls. Crowds swirled in the streets, eddying round stage-coaches and freight wagons, emitting cowboy yells, calling one another 'Pardner', firing blank cartridges.

Today neither of them had made any pretence. Hitchcock was to be the climax, and it had reduced them both to alert hostility. As he nursed the station-wagon through swirls of merry-makers, Marta found herself saying vehemently, "I will not stay in the same room with you."

"I'll continue to be a perfect little gentleman. But if we can get only one room, you'll stay in it with me."

However, the Hitchcock Hotel provided a suite, bedroom and sitting-room. When they were alone in it, he said, "Your modesty is protected, Mrs. Hammond. But observe that the only way out is through my room."

She watched him inspect the bedroom windows and said, "I won't jump out—it's six storeys, after all. The fire-escape is at the other end of the hall."

He nodded towards the windows, beyond which stretched a waste

of nondescript, bare, sun-parched hills hideous in the sun, and far away a line of squat peaks. "That's a desert you haven't had a chance to learn about," he suggested.

Yes, but there were railways, there were buses, and she saw a silver liner angling upwards from an airport. "For that matter, there must be fifty pictures of me on file right across the street." She pointed to a building at the corner. The sign read, '*Hitchcock Herald*'.

"Go ahead," he said. "The *Herald* would also be glad to score a beat by turning in Marie Royce."

But he 'phoned the *Herald* while she was unpacking her bag. He asked the city-desk whether any message had been left there for Henry Hammond. None had, and he got the same answer from the telephone and telegraph companies. Clearly he had expected instructions or information, and Marta's excitement began at that moment. He put in a call for a newspaper in Denver and, when he got it, asked about a Mr. Barney. The newspaper appeared not to know where Mr. Barney could be reached.

He was scowling and there was an angry red above his cheek-bones. Marta inquired sweetly, "Some friend of yours, Mr. Hammond, who has failed to keep his rendezvous?"

"Yes," he said bluntly, "the man we're waiting for."

Clearly, flippancy made him mad, and it would be good tactics to keep him mad. During the afternoon she was as flippant as possible. Meanwhile she washed her stockings and underwear, spent a long time on her hands and hair, lay on the bed and listened to her radio. The radio was celebrating Old West Week with the town. Scott came to the door and inquired sourly, "Didn't you learn those cowboy songs twenty years ago?" "But I love them," she said lyrically, "I'm a Westerner. You must understand how much they mean to me." She turned the radio higher. Scott banged the door.

There were bus and plane schedules under the glass of the writing-table. She memorized them and, finding railway time-tables in a drawer, soon knew all the ways out of Hitchcock. Hands behind her head, she lay there and thought hard. She would get no more than one chance. She must risk everything and make the one chance good. She must identify it instantly when it came.

At seven o'clock the door opened. "We'll have dinner up here," he said.

"Afraid I'll make a scene? Or that someone will pick me up?"

He didn't like the theme. So she sounded it again after dinner, standing by the window while sunset gave a faint charm to the overgrown frontier town and the noise in the streets quadrupled. "Too bad your executioner hasn't joined you," she said. "But that means you've got to give me another night to live. Our honeymoon is lengthened by at least one night. You ought to take your bride out to see the carnival, Mr. Hammond. Imagine how I long for bright lights, and dancing, and one last, poignant taste of joy."

He scowled at her, and she went on rapidly. "Besides, you made me

a promise. I've ruined two pairs of stockings already on this trip. Now there's a run in these." She thrust a leg towards him. "You wanted me to mount the scaffold in my best."

"You've got the bus and train departures by heart?"

"Of course. But all I'd have to do would be to scream and say you had insulted me."

"Sure. The police wouldn't have Marie's description."

"And besides you wouldn't ever insult me, would you, Henry? A whole week together and no Boy Scout could have shown more lofty ideals." She smiled as dazzlingly as possible. "Henry, I'd adore to see you in a *crêpe*-hair beard. Put on your sombrero and show me the town."

In the end he could not stand her needling and they went out. They were promptly engulfed in Western joy. Bearded men and girls in hoop skirts flung confetti in their faces. Boys banged torpedoes at their feet. Groups closed round them inviting them to eat, to name their poison, to see what the boys in the back room would have. Jazz blared through open doors, blank cartridges numbed their ears, every corner had a group of earnest songsters. Scott hated it, and, clinging to his arm, she determined to be overjoyed. When someone thrust a tickler in her face she languished at him. When someone else pulled her away and planted a resounding kiss on her mouth, she laughed loudly and embraced him. A young man with dramatic sideburns fell into step with her and began to describe the attractions of a dance hall. Why not shake the tenderfoot she was with, he suggested, and see life?

Scott shoved the young man away. "Get the hell out of here!" He pulled her through a doorway into a store. "You said you wanted clothes. Well, buy some."

"All right," she said submissively, "what shall I buy?"

"What do you want?"

She bought stockings. She bought a little yellow cotton dress and a slip to go with it. She carried on an animated conversation with the clerk and with her husband, consulting him anxiously about the slip. That suggested underwear, and she had the girl spread out half a dozen pairs of steps-ins for her husband's inspection, holding some of them up to her hips. "Don't you really think I ought to have another night-gown, Henry?" She giggled archly, said, "Or do you like pyjamas better?" and ended by making it a cheap, showy *négligé* covered with ribbons and embroidery.

Out on the pavement, Scott said, against the wall of noise, "For heaven's sake, what has got into you? You're acting like a shop-girl at Coney Island."

She squeezed his arm. "No, like a bride who knows she has offended the groom but doesn't understand how. You're so censorious, Henry. Just think, in all the time we've known each other, you have never bought me a drink."

She pulled him through doors whence an enormous music was

issuing. It was the most garish place she had ever seen: a juke box as large as a pipe-organ and luminous with five different colours, a long bar, a small dance floor, scores of tables—and all suffocatingly packed with merry-makers. Scott resigned himself and captured a table as two people rose from it. A waitress dressed like a drum-major's came up and he ordered highballs. He looked like a helplessly scandalized Puritan divine.

Marta enjoyed her highball and his discomfort. "At Petit Marais the summit of dissipation was a can of beer," she said. "I'm grateful to you for giving me a glimpse of the great world. Would you like to dance with me, Scott?"

"No."

'Others might,' she thought. A sunburned man in riding-breeches and puttees of an oil engineer was getting rapidly less interested in his own party. She met his eyes a couple of times. She chatted at Scott, called the girl and ordered another highball, delicately lifted a shoulder and glanced over it at the engineer, who was getting the idea. . . . Say you got out on the dance floor. Say you got some of the clotted crowd in between. A dash through the door into the thronged street. She might gain a minute or two, at least they would be separated, it would be an even fight again . . .

"Come on!" Scott pulled her brusquely to her feet. But he wasn't looking at her potential pick-up, he was looking in the opposite direction. A chill broke through her preoccupation—she had forgotten that they were fugitives. The evil faces of the thugs at Petit Marais flashed into her mind, but relief followed promptly. For as Scott forced a way through the crowd, one arm holding hers and the other preposterously hugging her packages, she saw that someone was angling towards them. It was a big, chunky man with a wide grin and two black eyes—Bert Hagen, the truck driver they had rescued in North Dakota.

"Hi, Doc!" Bert Hagen bellowed as he came up. "Hello, sister! Didn't go to Glacier Park, after all?"

"We decided to take in Old West Week on the way," Scott said frostily.

There was a hearty handshaking while the crowd pressed against them, an exchange of news with Scott trying to edge her away, a loud insistence that they come over and meet Bert Hagen's wife and sister-in-law. Marta urged, "It's too early to go home, Henry," and Scott insisted that it was bedtime. He said, "We're going home," and pulled her out of Hagen's grasp. She said, "We're staying at the Hitchcock Hotel. Maybe you'll look us up."

Out in the street, he said, "That was idiotic. You would have to do it entirely by yourself. Your own hope is just as much endangered by Hagen's knowing you as our anonymity is."

Back at the hotel, he said again, "No one can help you. And you've got to do it right, the first time."

That was quite true. It was also true that his anger and impatience

emphasized the failure of his plans. The game was even. . . . She took her purchases into the bedroom and put on the *négligé*, kicked off her shoes, fluffed her hair, and drifted back to the sitting-room.

He had had highballs sent up. "You didn't get to finish your second one."

"Does this mean we've reached our evening truce?" she asked. "Late at night we usually feel regretful and friendly. Shall we talk mournfully about our childhood? Maybe I'll be led into more confidences and you'll find out something new."

"Well," he said coolly, "if we've had some agreeable moments, you've enjoyed them as much as I have. And you can't help wondering whether a scream would do the job. It wouldn't." He smiled at her with the same calm. "Why, yes, Marta, the ribbons on that idiotic garment are distracting, and the shoulders under it are fascinating, and any man's eyes would be drawn to the knees you keep crossing. And still a scream would certainly be misinterpreted."

"But think how confused the chambermaid will be," she said flippantly. "The sofa made up and one twin bed unused. And a famous beauty, too, though she won't know that. Of course not, Scott. I know you have no weaknesses. But it turns out that your plans have, doesn't it?"

He said, "You're making it easier, Marta. You haven't put on this hard-boiled attitude before."

"Have you been expecting me to break down and beg? As you point out, this is the end of the trip. This is where you behead me. Well, don't expect me to plead for mercy—I've never pleaded with anyone." She stretched her arms out of the idiotic sleeves—round, distracting arms. She thrust her legs out in front of her, truly distinguished legs, and let the idiotic flounce fall away from them. "Well, they'll have some fun with you, too. You've spent a week on the road with the famous beauty. It will come out that you bought the whole outfit for me—dress, underwear, night-gowns, stockings. If you had managed the whole thing for your personal advertising, you couldn't have done better. That will be appreciated, and I won't be the only partner in this honeymoon they'll be sceptical about. You've done well for yourself."

She flung the taunt at him coldly, drank deep from her highball, and laughed. "You see, there is nothing whatever I need consider. The awkward thing about defeating me is that, if I am defeated, nothing whatever means anything to me. There's no reason why I should do anything."

There was a series of muffled explosions and beyond the windows the sky was filled with blue and green stars. Somewhere, doubtless at the rodeo grounds, the Old West was setting off fireworks. Scott led her to the windows while more rockets swam across the sky.

"And maybe not," he said. "It's night, Marta. The Old West will stop celebrating before dawn, people have to get some sleep, and those buses and trains you've memorized will go on running. I could

put you on one, and I'd stay here myself to attract the attention of Damon's men, and your husband's."

He put an arm round her, and she was amused to find that her waist and shoulders automatically stiffened with hostility. "I'll tell you what happened, Marta. An idea finally broke across Dixon Gale's dim mind. He finally tumbled to the fact that Penfield had gone too far—too far for Gale's conscience, anyway. He protested—or maybe he threatened—and Penfield killed him. Obviously it was something serious, for he had to be killed. I think it was that flight to Natal or the one to Portland. And Penfield had done it for the gentle Idsu. And Idsu must certainly have been tied up with the German consulate's staff of secret agents in San Francisco. Penfield must have helped lay some Nazi game. He must have committed treason."

Immensely disturbed by perceiving how close he had come to an answer, she nevertheless refused to give him the satisfaction of moving out of the circle of his arm. "You need only tell me how I can get the proof," he said. "That's all I've ever wanted. I'll put you on a bus or turn my car over to you, and let you fade into the dark."

Another volley of rockets traced gold lacework on the sky. Marta stepped away from him. "It wasn't a good enough offer while your plans were working. It's nothing at all now that I know as well as you do that something has gone wrong."

"That throws us back on the original idea," he said unemotionally. "I've still got you in my hands. Well, when you go to bed, you might as well undress—you won't be able to get out."

She didn't undress, but lay awake while the town grew quiet, after packing her bag. If she had ever had any briefly disarming feeling for Scott Warner, it had been displaced by a clear and steady hate. She fell asleep and woke some hours later to absolute darkness and silence. She picked up her bag and, carrying her shoes, went to the door that led to the sitting-room. Silently she turned the knob and swung the door inward. The width of the room away, his voice was a calm whisper, "But I told you my sofa would be across the door, Marta." In the same silence she closed the door and retreated. It was an extremity of humiliation to undress in the dark, knowing that in the other room he was laughing at her.

The next morning even the surface courtesies had disappeared, and even the intimacies were hostile. He shaved with one eye on her. He said, "We won't go out at all today." He watched her so narrowly while a waiter brought breakfast that, when the door closed, she said contemptuously, "I haven't supposed a waiter could help me."

"Of course not. If you call attention to yourself, your game is lost at once. I've wondered, though, if you mightn't try to ruin mine at the same time."

Well, not yet—that was held in reserve. At the extremity it might be possible to gain something by running, screaming, and bringing the public in. But the outstanding fact, the fact which bade her wait and watch, was the failure of his colleagues to keep their rendezvous.

Every additional hour meant that the plan had gone farther wrong. In that failure her one quick chance might exist.

Knowing that steadied her. Whereas yesterday she had annoyed him by flippancy, today she could anger him by indifference. She washed a pair of stockings, sewed up the hem of her skirt, chatted idly with the chambermaid (Scott stalking in to fake some occupation at her writing-desk), sat at the window reading magazines or looking out at the streets and the hills beyond them. . . . Scott had grown gaunt. If you moistened a finger-tip and touched it to him he would sputter. He read through the *Hitchcock* and *Denver* and *Salt Lake City* papers. He listened to every news broadcast. He called the telephone and telegraph offices again. He tuned in the local station, listened to it for a few minutes, shut it off. He stood at various windows, sat down in every chair in turn, stretched out on the sofa, stalked the floor, started through the newspapers again.

Neither tried to make conversation. At one o'clock he ordered sandwiches and beer, hurried the waiter out, and himself put the table and trays in the corridor when they finished eating. The afternoon was the morning intensified. So Marta held herself to an outwardly contemptuous calm and watched the furrows in his forehead deepen. He was pure energy suddenly stopped short; it was a wonder that the arrested force in him did not break out in boils. . . . Desert sun grew so oppressive at the windows that she lowered the shades. The town below them swarmed and shouted. In the corridor outside people passed talking and laughing. Inside this room pressure grew and grew.

"Tell me," she said suddenly, "how do you feel about it, Mr. Warner? Does dishonour make you wince a little? Do you get a mild pang of shame from force and cruelty? Do you have to despise yourself, or is it perfectly easy?"

"It's just a job that has to be done. I don't think about you, Marta."

"That's good. You might feel a little cheap otherwise—to be bullying a woman. Your picture of yourself might get tarnished when you remembered that the job involved hypocrisy and betrayal and brute force."

He wasn't annoyed, he was hardly even listening. "If you had been a man it would have been a little quicker, that's all. You're merely the person who has what I've got to get."

"Still," she said serenely, "the methods were a little dirty. Even slimy. You insinuated yourself into my confidence. When I was in trouble you offered help and induced me to trust you. I acted in good faith, but you kidnapped me in the intention of betraying my faith. You broke my privacy. You killed the hope I'd worked for and earned. You soiled my decent self-respect."

"That might have been too bad," he said negligently—"in some circumstances."

"Of course, you haven't done anything so straightforward as to

flog me or threaten me with rape. Simple, crude terrorism like that is the Nazi way. Your terrorism is just offering me a chance to buy my freedom. Forgive me if, from a little distance, it's hard to tell you from what you think you're fighting."

"That makes a dramatic passage, doesn't it? Or it would, if either of us mattered."

She kept her voice saturated with disdain. "I owe you thanks for one thing, Mr. Warner. My own life hasn't taught me to think highly of myself. I've had to get used to feeling mean and degraded and dishonest and dirty. Well, you've made me feel comparatively clean. I suppose the victim does, when he sees what the terrorist really is."

She spoke slowly, happy in finding the precise words she wanted to aim at him. "You've shown me a new kind of gentlemanly, cold brutality. And a kind of dishonesty that won't leave me much shame about my own. And a fatuous cruelty. And a dishonour that will keep me from ever feeling anything about you except contempt."

She had talked to one other man in that way. It had made Gene Penfield writhe and rage; it had no effect whatever on Scott Warner. But it was profoundly satisfying.

The afternoon wore on; the noise of the streets increased. Scott's stay in any chair was limited to less than five minutes. Tension radiated from him tangibly. Her own strain was held in check by the knowledge that every minute proved more clearly the miscarriage of his plans.

At five o'clock he tuned in a news broadcast. The radio in the sitting-room had tuning-knobs set in the wall and a loudspeaker ridiculously hidden in a ceiling light-fixture, so that one sat looking up at it. The broadcaster raced through items about fighting in the Solomons, the Russian front, an R.A.F. raid over France, Washington news. Indifferent, Marta went to a window and raised the shade, to look out. The broadcast turned to local news and Scott stood up to switch it off. Then he was frozen where he stood.

"Denver, Colorado," the voice said out of the light-fixture. "Senator Tom Fetterman died here this afternoon, of pneumonia, following an illness of six weeks. . . ."

Scott Warner's hand closed on her wrist so tightly that pain shot up her arm. He held her so while the voice finished its brief summary of the Senator's career. "Since he had less than two years left to serve," it concluded, "it is supposed that his successor will be chosen by appointment, not election."

Her wrist ached when he dropped it. Her knees bent with weakness and she sat down and watched him at the window, then in a chair. He had been a battery of frustrated energy; now there was no energy in him at all, he was an exhausted cell. . . . Her heart was thumping wildly, her mind sickly dizzy with hope and dread. In an instant everything had changed. If the basis of hope had changed, so had the

basis of fear. She held herself to absolute control and, to force some clue into the open, loosed a taunt.

"That teaches us that plans are very pretty things, Mr. Warner."

He made a brusque gesture, said nothing, stared at the floor. She tried again. "I'm no use to you whatever now. You looked at your cards, calculated the risks, and made your bet. You've lost—you've lost altogether—it's over now, it's finished. Nothing can possibly change that. You may as well let me go."

Humiliatingly, her voice broke with the last words. He did not even notice. He said, "You're wrong. Up to this minute there was at least a faint hope that I could eventually find a way of using you without exposing you. Now that hope is gone."

A full hour of silence followed. Inwardly, Marta was going to pieces. She existed in pure ice, sitting quietly, facing the finality of what he had said. She must fight to maintain a minimum ability to think, aware that if she broke in the least she would break fatally. . . . It was past 6.30 when Scott stood up, having reached some kind of decision. He tried the door and put the key in his pocket. Taking up the phone, he called the garage where the station-wagon was stored. He ordered the tank filled, the tyres and battery checked, the oil changed.

"I won't go with you," she said, her voice edged with panic.

"You'll have your choice. It won't make much difference which way you choose. Either way, you're now going to find out what gentlemanly brutality really is."

The next half-hour was far worse. Her mind contracted to small, hot, agonized focus. Once the door opened, she would rush out screaming. Or . . . Or . . . Or . . . Every swift notion that presented itself was fantastic. But there was one solid thing in the midst of hysterics: she would never leave this hotel with him.

He stood up. "Do you see that it's wise to eat dinner? I'll order something. If necessary, I can meet the waiter in the hall."

"I won't make any kind of promise. And you'll never get me out of Hitchcock with you."

"You see, I haven't any qualms." He shrugged a shoulder at the window. "There's the newspaper. I can turn you in there quite as well as at Silvertip."

So he had decided to march straight on the stronghold, to take her to Silvertip! But at that moment she observed that something had happened to his face. There was a marked droop in his eyelids, and patches of small white spots had come out on his cheeks and forehead. She had seen that before—where? What did it mean? Oh, that day he was sick—of course! These were the signs of an approaching migraine. Brought on by strain and sudden, catastrophic failure.

Instantly she saw her chance and knew how to make use of it.

Abruptly and completely, she let hostility go out of her. "I will make a truce," she said. "We can eat dinner like decent people. Go ahead and order. I promise you I'll neither scream nor run. I won't

promise anything past dinner, but I'll be well behaved until it's over."
"Good."

He crossed the room. But before he could take up the telephone it rang with a suddenness that startled them both. Marta's nerves jangled, and alert caution showed in his face. "Yes?" he answered it. His face lightened. "Wyeth?" Then, "Where was it sent? . . . Thanks."

When he turned towards her, both lethargy and hardness had gone from him. "Brighton—I think that's the first stop north of Denver. Wyeth is Irv Barney's middle name. . . . It was a telegram. *Our representative will call tomorrow.* . . . We won't be leaving to-night, Marta, after all. Someone is on the way to help me."

"Who? What does it mean?"

"I don't know. Probably Irv himself. We'll know tomorrow. Anyway, it's help." He sat down and had already begun to look younger, less worn, more alive. "I'll know where we stand. We can fit things together. Somebody besides me can get his mind to work on it. It means there must be some chance, some way . . ."

He stood up again and broke into vehement speech. "I had no choice! . . . This means—maybe you've got a chance, Marta. From the beginning I've hugged that chance to my heart. I've done my damndest to think out some way of saving you. Of doing my job without exposing you. I got no help from you! Good God, Marta, do you suppose I've enjoyed it? I'd give my soul to help you win your fight. Nothing you've called me could be as low as I've known I am—all along."

She found that passionate abasement curiously pathetic. "I believe you," she said, curiously understanding that she did.

"You've got guts!" he said fiercely. "You refuse to be licked. You're as brave as you are beautiful. . . . Maybe there's going to be a chance. Maybe Irv knows the way out. I'll keep your secret if it can be kept." He was looking at her with a surprising, a disturbing, fixity. "I'm not licked yet. Maybe you aren't licked."

They were staring at each other in the dizzy renewal of hope. Her pulses were leaping with the recognition of reprieve. Everything had been overturned, but in the debris there was a chance of escape. Then, with no warning, the self-command of Scott Warner cracked wide open. He muttered something that was not words and not quite a groan—and took her in his arms."

Marta said "No!" angrily, then whispered "Oh, no!" in desperation, turned her head, and struggled to break away. Then she couldn't struggle, but simply stood in his arms and felt tears beginning to sting in her eyes. Then, to her amazement—to her shocked horror—she was turning towards him and whispering "Scott!" An unrecognizable, vast emotion woke in her. She locked her own arms hard behind his head and raised her face to meet his kiss. It was impossible, it was insane, and it was happening. The kiss was impossible, the tumult in her blood was impossible, and they couldn't be doubted.

They drew apart, looking at each other. Marta tried to repudiate her awareness. 'It's just that I've had too many violent emotions in too short a time,' she frantically told herself. More desperately—'It's just that not enough men have made love to me.' More desperately still—'It doesn't mean anything, it's just that I've slept alone too long. It isn't possible, it isn't possible, it isn't possible. . . .' And he reached for her again, and tears spilled out on her cheeks, and she walked into his arms.

The crest passed. They were subdued to a shyness behind which there was an electrical unrest. "That did it," he said, a little hoarsely. She would not look at him, but nodded, tried to stop trembling, tried to repress at least a dozen of the many dozen contradictory feelings, and said, "I think maybe it did."

"I've travelled with you for a week. No man on earth—"

But if he kissed her even once more, she would not be able to answer for anything. Desperately, she said, "Scott! We were going to have dinner. Before sanity forsakes us altogether—"

"The hell with dinner—"

"Scott!" She had to end that electrical unrest, she had to subdue those several dozen unsubdued emotions. "Scott, I'm terribly hungry. You said yourself—"

"That was before . . ." But he was beginning to retrieve a little sanity, too. "Well, order your own dinner. I don't want any. I think I may be getting a migraine."

She had forgotten the migraine. Remembering it made her remember desperation—and decision. This was the worst conflict of all. Something showed in her eyes, but he misunderstood it, and promised her, "If I get it, it will only last an hour or two."

She picked up the 'phone to order dinner, and found that she was so tremulous that it was wise to sit down. "Make it a good one—and a cocktail for a toast," he said. When she had ordered, she looked at him squarely. She said, slowly, agonized by a final need for honesty, "Remember what I told you. Remember what I said about men who . . . who feel some emotion about me."

He came to stand over her chair, turn her face up, and kiss her. It was—temporarily—safe now. She yielded altogether, her arms holding him, her lips surrendered. Oh, entirely surrendered.

So she came into the moment of test. The tableau of that solitary dinner focused all the ironies of the week, all the paradox, all the dishonour and betrayal, and all the sweetness. She could acknowledge, for a moment, that there had been sweetness. She forced herself to eat tranquilly and heartily. Great bursts of shame surged over her—and bursts of delight. Neither of them said much. But she knew that, reclining on the sofa, he kept his eyes on her. She knew also that a positively bride-like blush kept reappearing in her cheeks. It was a poignant, divided, humiliating hour. But, one way or the other, it would be more humiliating pretty soon. . . . Except!

It was nine o'clock when the waiter took the table away. Now!

The time had passed for shame and for regret alike. This was her moment. And Scott's face was now ghastly pale.

"You've got that migraine, haven't you?" she said.

"Yes. It has begun to outline you with a rainbow. You don't need a halo. My God, you're beautiful, Marta."

"Shall I give you the ergotamine? Oh!"—in dismay—"I can't boil the needle."

"You don't need to."

Truc. She took the medicine-case into the bathroom. The little bottle that had burned in her mind for days was not ergotamine. It was labelled, "Morphine Sulphate. 1 cc. = $\frac{1}{4}$ gr." Months at Dr. Whittemore's had taught her all about it. She drew 4 cc. into the graduated tube, sterilized the needle with alcohol, and stood for a moment looking in the mirror. Her cheeks were flushed and soft, her eyes were deep and soft. She looked bride-like, she looked happy and half-fulfilled, a woman who had been soundly kissed, who had surrendered to a kiss.

Well, at Dr. Whittemore's the little tube had slid her peacefully out of agony into forgetfulness. Just as peacefully it would slip him out of success.

He was sitting up and had rolled back his sleeve. "Good—that looks like a good-sized dose," he said. She pinched up some skin, deftly thrust the needle into it, slowly and without a pause sank the plunger home. "There!" she said, with a tremulous sigh. He took her hand, kissed it, held it to his cheek—and that gave a properly poetic touch to an expert job of betrayal. "I'll be all right in an hour," he said, and lay back, covering his eyes. Well, say three hours. Or four.

She sat quietly watching him till he began to relax. Then she went into the bedroom. In no hurry, she packed the little bag which she had brought from Petit Marais. The familiar routine, the familiar list. Stockings and shoes, underwear, blouse, cosmetics, sleeping-pills—she could do it blindfolded, only this time there was the reflection that Scott Warner had bought some of them for her. Last time she had forgotten a night-gown—take it this time, and take the grey suit and the new yellow dress and the slip. . . . She had everything. She sat at the little desk, thought hard, got out a sheet of paper, and wrote a few lines. Then she washed her face, put on some make-up, got her hat, and went out to the sitting-room.

He was not quite out, probably one grain was not enough to knock him out altogether. But he would be without pain—and without awareness. . . . She could not pick a man's pocket! She shrank a little, thinking, "Tarts do that." Well, if tarts could, so could she. When she slipped her note into the pocket of his coat, which was hanging on a chair, she found his wallet. He had a lot of money. Nearly nine hundred dollars. He could get more. She couldn't.

She stood looking at him. Maybe she wasn't going to get over the shame she felt now. She shrugged: that was nonsense; she had learned

that you could get over any shame. And whose betrayal had come first, his or hers?

A slow thought formed: 'Like every man who ever did, you were a fool to trust me.' Another thought displaced it: 'If you had kissed me even once more, I might have been the fool, not you—I think I should have been.' She felt a brief, agonizing loss, remembering how completely she had abandoned herself to his kiss. If things had gone otherwise, if there had been any logic in life. . . . "Hell," she muttered, "I didn't make the world." She went out into the hall, closed the door, walked down the corridor and rang for the elevator.

She had forgotten how noisy the Hitchcock streets were, but she was glad the carnival was going on. For wariness had come back to her, bringing all the sharpened fear and suspicion which she must now resume, and which from now on she would have to face alone.

She made for the station, where, she knew, the next train out was a Union Pacific westbound flyer due at eleven o'clock. She scrutinized everybody—but, she found, she had a new confidence. No one had recognized her all these days. No one was going to recognize her. She was going to make it good once more.

Yes, the ticket agent told her, there were accommodations—Old West Week had been anticipated. Several Pullmans were waiting on a side-track now, made up, and she could have her choice, San Francisco or Los Angeles. She chose San Francisco, took a bedroom, and went to the car. She locked the door behind her and the little room was precious, a sanctuary, a giver of life. But exultation brought a worse tension, and the twenty-five minutes she spent sitting on the edge of the bed, merely waiting, were the hardest of all. Then tension ended. A train came roaring into the station, a switch engine coupled on her car, there was a banging and jolting, then a brief pause. At last they began to move.

Now she could abandon herself to ecstasy. She had done it; she had done it! She was alone, she was free, and she was still unrecognized. She had not yielded to despair or to bribery, she had fought Scott Warner to the end and she had won, she had saved herself and her secret, against impossible odds she had won out. She was a free woman. She was inviolate.

Almost drunk with joy, she sat by the window, looking out at barren country streaming by under a late moon. Shapeless hills opening out and folding in, wide flats, glimpses of cedars, a vast openness—and this time she was looking at it alone. . . . San Francisco? Never! It was too near Sacramento, too near Silvertip. Where would she be when she woke in the morning? Ogden, perhaps? No matter. Wherever the train first stopped after breakfast—after a breakfast which she would eat alone—that was where she would get off. That was where she would . . . start from.

She turned from the window and opened her bag. Now she felt disgust welling up in her. She had certainly not spared contemptuous words for Scott Warner—what words fitted her? Hers had been the

ugliest possible betrayal, she had betrayed him when he trusted her . . . when he trusted her because he had felt her lips answering his. That would strike through and rouse disgust whenever she remembered it, from now on, all her life. That, she thought slowly, was not the point. The point was that now she had a life, she had her life. The point was, she had done what had to be done.

'He paid for this night-gown,' she thought, putting it on. But that was only a slight irony. She laid out her toilet articles and spent a luxurious time in her locked and private room making herself utterly clean and her clothes utterly neat. The cherished neatness of a fugitive. A fugitive who had survived, who had proved that she would win. At last she turned off the light and went to bed.

Ecstasy swept over her again, in her private room, in this unimaginable aloneness and privacy. She was alone, she was free, and she was unrecognized. Tonight she would sleep sound, without fear, without annoyance.

She drowsed to the hypnotic mutter of the rails. Suddenly she sat up, having heard a key at the door. It wasn't the door to the corridor. It was the one to the next bedroom, the one they opened when you took two bedrooms in suite. Only the conductor had the key. What did he want?

She turned on the light. As she did so, the door opened and a man came through it. It wasn't the conductor. It was Gene Penfield.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHIEF OF POLICE HAD MADE NO CONCESSION TO OLD WEST WEEK, BUT the editor of the *Hitchcock Herald* was made up as a gentleman gambler in yellow pantaloons, blue frock-coat, boiled shirt, crimson silk waistcoat with yellow flowers, patent-leather boots, and a wig which curled to his shoulders. At 9 a.m. both showed the ravages of carnival, and neither had any affection for Scott Warner, who had routed them out but was only intermittently able to see them through the hangover of a morphine shot that must have been gigantic.

"When I remember I could have slept till noon!" the editor muttered. He stroked the wig and went on, thoughtfully, "I say run him in, Tim."

"Naw, that's not the carnival spirit," the chief of police said. "We don't run anybody in. What say I run him out? Out of town."

The editor fixed Scott with a cynical gaze. "When do you unveil what you're selling, stranger?" He picked up the envelope from the *Herald's* morgue and sifted a lot of photographs of Marta Penfield. "Jewellery? Bathing-suits? Stockings?—Let us rejoice that in those days there was still silk to point a camera at——"

Buzzers were sounding in Scott's ears and his nerves stuck straight through his skin. Still holding his temper in check, he repeated for

the dozenth time, "My name is Scott Warner, though I'm using another one at the hotel. I wrote *Fascist America*—you'll find it in the public library——"

"Cosmetics, I guess, lotions, lip-sticks, depilatories. Whatever you sell, you're a body-snatcher. Call it a ghoul. God has seen fit to dump many a Press agent on my doorstep, but I never saw one before that tried to make money out of the celebrated dead. You live on carrion, stranger. In the language of Old West Week, you're a buzzard."

"Yeah." The chief of police was gazing sentimentally at a photograph. "She was a fine figure of a woman, too. I bet she had a hard life." He sighed.

Scott's voice roughened as self-control grew precarious. "She was at the Hitchcock Hotel till sometime last night. She was there all the night before. She got to Hitchcock late in the afternoon, day before yesterday——"

The editor said, "They work hard enough to earn an honest living, at that. He's studied all this stuff, Tim, and you'd find he's got it all worked out. Santo Espiritu—that checks. Oasis, Nevada—that checks. He's got all the answers figured. Our cue is to weep. We think of those search parties scouring the desert all in vain, and we shed tears. We shed tears till it turns out that the lost beauty made straight by convenient 'plane to some place where she could replenish her supply of Violette's Vitamin-Irradiated Vanishing Cream——"

"She probably didn't leave the hotel till midnight. She can't have got very far by now——"

"Oh, stranger!" the editor said sadly. "We are an unsophisticated people out here in God's country. Even if some of us have learned caution from buying gold bricks, it leaves us in the jollity of Old West Week. Of course she can't have got far! If she had how could Tim's posse and my photographer track her down to her boudoir and pose her, radiant, rosy, and refreshed, against a tub frothing with Barbara's Bubble Bath——"

Scott uttered a strangled half-yell to the chief of police: "I drop a hundred thousand dollars in rewards in your lap!" To the editor, "I offer you the biggest story of your life——"

"Just possibly, Tim, it could be the local forty-rod. His hands shake, his face looks as if it had been sand-blasted. Possibly it's too much Wild West Week."

"Naw, he ain't drunk. Dope, maybe."

"Well, I can't take him." The editor stood up. "Wise guy, you stink. Lots of you birds try to sell me a bill of goods. That's all right, a man has to eat. Sometimes I even buy a little, if it's amusing. But you're diseased. A man that would try to make advertising out of a woman dead for two years, a woman who, as Tim puts it, had a hard life—moment by moment I can't stand you. If I throw you out of this office I'll feel like an Eagle Scout. If Tim runs you out of Hitchcock—

in fact, if you don't get out by the first train, 'plane, bus, truck, or bicycle, Tim will heave you out——"

"On your way," Tim said acquiescently, standing up.

Wyoming sun blinded Scott's tortured eyes. He would get over the morphine jitters eventually, but there was a grave doubt if his intelligence would recover. Here ended the one idea he had been able to form when he swam to consciousness through the cbbing drug, an hour and a half ago. Break the story to the papers and the police! Get it on the wires and arouse America! As far back as they had had any plans at all, it had been a certainty that this was the biggest newspaper story in the country, one that could not be surpassed till someone shot Adolf Hitler. No one had wondered if it might not be believed.

He could remember having felt qualms over the need of treating Marta Penfield harshly. When the time came to laugh, that was where the laughing could start. She had asked him to be chivalrous towards womanhood in distress. She had counted on a face and figure out of *Vogue*. On the bare arm and the revealed knee. On the whispered word and the soft cheek and the warm and yielding lips. As shameless as a child and as efficient as a rattlesnake, she had been right to count on them. If he were licked, he was licked by a champion. And with his own morphine.

He stormed into the suite at the Hitchcock Hotel and said to Ann Sloane, "They thought I was faking. They laughed at me. They won't take it and we're stopped."

Ann Sloane had presented herself at 7.30, when he was trying to come to on cold water and black coffee. He had recognized her as Dixon Gale's fiancée and she had identified herself as Irv Barney's promised representative. She had brought no news from Irv except that he would come to Hitchcock when he thought he could come unobserved. She had listened to Scott's vehement story, understood the disaster, ministered to his grogginess. She was efficient—and altogether useless.

Now she said, "Why should they believe you? Irv said they wouldn't. He said you don't understand newspapers."

"You got him on the 'phone?"

She nodded. "I'm afraid he was a little violent. I'm afraid—he says the hell with you, Mr. Warner. Oh, why didn't you tie her up? Don't you know her at all? Why didn't you drag her into the first police-station?"

"Because she's wanted for murder!" Scott shouted. "Sorry! Look, I'm the incompetent of the world. There were five thousand possible mistakes and I made them all. Well, are we stopped, do we quit and go home? Does Penfield become Senator—yes, and why hasn't he been made Senator already? Has Irv got any ideas? Have you?"

"Yes; sit down and smoke a cigarette. . . . But I still don't see," Ann Sloane said, marvelling—"Did you just hold out your arm and ask her to jab you?"

"In one word, yes." He sat down, realized that Marta had been in this chair when he leaned over to kiss her, and stood up again. . . . She could have got out by any 'plane, train, or bus. She could have thumbed a ride—from some new innocent. She could have walked. At this moment she might be in another hotel right here in Hitchcock. She might be at any little town five miles out by walking, three hundred by train, six hundred by 'plane. Or on any train. Or across the street. The police could have found out. He couldn't.

"They've got to take it—it's the biggest story in the United States!" he said. "I won't find her, Irv won't find her, but the public can find her. Get it on the air and in the headlines. Any clump of sagebush she crouches behind, there'll be a snooper there by noon. Any bus she gets off will have a welcoming committee at the door. She can't slip through a hundred million fingers."

"Irv says the hell with her. He says you've tried that notion and lost out, and he never thought it was worth anything, anyway. He says you're sure to go proud and try to find her, and if you do he's through with you. He's going to California and raise up a little hell. He says don't bother to 'phone Mr. Stein—he'll do it—and if you think you have to talk to him, 'phone him at Denver before 10.30. Otherwise he's taking the eleven o'clock 'plane West, even if it's full of bloodhounds. I'll see if I can get him for you."

"What can he do in California? We had exactly one chance. I made that play. I lost it. We're licked. We might as well go home and read the newspapers."

The small, blonde girl gazed at him with mild derision. "You mean you've lost Marta. I'm not in on all this, Mr. Warner. I'm here because Irv—well, he seemed so terribly in earnest. I thought the idea was to stop Mr. Penfield from being appointed Senator. I didn't think it was holding on to Marta. That seems to be all you can think of. I can see why. You've been making love to her."

"I have not!" he shouted. He felt himself blushing. Ann Sloane said, "I thought so. Everyone does. When you're with Marta, you make love to her."

He faced her. "We all guessed wrong—including you. She wasn't sleeping with Dixon Gale. She wasn't interested, he wasn't interested—that was just printer's ink."

This time Ann Sloane had the grace to blush. "That doesn't matter any more. But I'd like to believe you. How do you know?"

"Marta said so."

She said, "What's that got to do with it?" with complete contempt. A picture flashed in his mind: Marta looking into a camp fire that blazed against Montana darkness, then turning to say, with a sincerity that could not be questioned, "Whatever your theories have worked out, Dixon Gale and I were not lovers." Even now it was impossible to disbelieve her. He said, "You're wrong. She was telling the truth."

"You mean you've been making love to her. You're in love with her. That's how they all end up."

"In love with her? You wouldn't think so if I could get my hands on her neck."

Ann Sloane drew a long breath. "Please stop galloping round the room. Do you want to find Marta or do you want to stop that appointment? If the job you started to do is more important than a love affair, you ought to get to work. It's obvious you aren't doing anything here. I think both of us ought to join Irv."

Scott sat down and wrestled his mind into something like clearness. "You're right," he said. "Hitchcock is just a town that hasn't got Marta in it. If Irv's going to California, he's probably going to Silver-tip. I don't know what he thinks he can do there. But I've proved I can't do anything—I'll do whatever he says. There's no direct 'plane from here. There's a north-west 'plane to Salt Lake at eleven. There's an Intercontinental at two for Reno. They both connect for Sacramento. You get to Silvertip from either Reno or Sacramento. Why don't we take the two o'clock?"

"All right," she said, "I'll 'phone for seats. I'll try to get Irv, too. You'd better wash your face. You could even shave."

The thought of shaving roused another piquancy. Too many mornings, too much intimacy, Marta Penfield as Mrs. Hammond, Marta Penfield in *négligé* while Henry Hammond shaved, the exhilaration of flight and the knowledge that pursuit had not caught up with them. Oh, hell! . . . He took off his coat and threw it at a chair. It slid to the floor and something bright rolled from it across the rug. Ann Sloane picked it up, looked at him, almost smiled. "But, Mr. Warner! That would be called bigamy."

It was the wedding-ring which Marta had bought at a ten-cent store in Bemidji—something like a decade ago. "We had to look like man and wife, didn't we?" he said angrily. "There's the Mann Act." He picked up his wallet—empty—which had also slid from the pocket, and, replacing it, found a crumpled sheet of paper. "What's this?" he said. Then he saw that it was signed 'Marta'.

I think I know what must have happened. There wasn't any flight to Portland. I know there wasn't. When you said Portland, I thought of Portland—Kelsey Portland. The newspaperman who broadcasts from Berlin. I think it was Kelsey Portland they flew to Natal—I know they flew someone. I think Professor Idsu got Gene to. That must be it. It must be what they quarrelled about. They were quarrelling when they got back from Natal and from then on. I think Dixon Gale must have known something criminal about Partland—or about Portland and Professor Idsu. Dixon wouldn't have done anything wrong, he didn't want to be President.

I didn't realize this till you talked about Portland in relation to Professor Idsu. You won't believe me, but that's true. I must be right—it explains things. If Partland is a traitor now, maybe he was then.

If Professor Idsu was mixed up with treason, then go to Sacramento and find Dr. Miura. He's a dentist. If Idsu's in it, he'll know.

I hope this helps you, Scott. I think you can work out what happened the night Dixon died, too. Good luck.

I'd like to think you kept my ring.

Marta.

Ann Sloane, reading over his shoulder, said, "Who is Kelsey Partland?"

Scott seized her arm. "Could it have been Partland? You were the one who said Partland. Could you be wrong? Could Gale have said Partland?"

She said, "I don't know. . . . He just said it once, just one sentence, he was muttering, he was mad. . . . I don't know. . . . Who is Partland?"

The author of *Fascist America* knew his field. "He broadcasts on short wave for Dr. Gocbbels now. He used to run magazines for the *Bund*. Who is Dr. Miura?"

"A leader of the *Nisei* at Sacramento. We used to hear that Jap secret societies had tried to kill him—or wanted to. He's probably in a concentration camp now," Ann said simply. "All the really loyal American Japanese are."

"Partland—and the *Bund*—and a Japanese art collector who's gone home—and a Japanese dentist. You say the dentist was anti-secret-society. Marta says he knows about Idsu." His mind clawed for sense. "Early in 1939 I thought the F.B.I. had Partland marked down. They never took him in. But he got out." He began to catch fire. "That could be why and how. That's what Marta is saying. She thinks Idsu had Penfield fly him to Natal—a jump ahead of the F.B.I.! She could be right."

His mind was coming back! It ran swiftly across many facts, which began to fit together. "She tried to pay a fee! She got away from me, but she would help out! She has headed us right. She tried——"

"Oh, stop finding things to adore Marta for——"

"We're back in the game! We don't need her. She can go run any lathe she finds anywhere and we can run the bases. If your Jap knows—if it turns out that the F.B.I. were after Partland!" He seized her hand. "Our hero won't do Taylor Damon any good from that moment on."

The girl began to respond to his renewed excitement. "Then let's get going——"

"The eleven o'clock 'plane. Come on!" Then he stopped short. "No! We've got to tell Irv. We can't let him be ignorant of this when he gets to California——"

"You take the 'plane. I'll phone Irv——"

"You take it. You know this Jap—you'll save us time. Get to Sacramento—you'll practically be home. Get hold of him. I'll take the two o'clock 'plane—I'll be at Sacramento three hours after you.

I'll get hold of Irv, you'll find the Jap, and we've still got a couple of marbles left. What are we waiting for?"

There would be time to shave later. There would be time to think, to pack—what about the station-wagon?—damn the station-wagon. Get her on the 'plane, get back here and 'phone, Irv. If Irv had left, flag his 'plane somewhere, wire to all landing-fields. . . . Ann Sloane had a little bag in the lobby. They leaped into a taxi and made off towards the airport through streets thronging for the last day of Wild West Week.

"There won't be a seat—there never is," Ann said.

"You'll hang by your knees from a wing, then. But there will be—the cards have begun to run our way." His mind had cleared, his nerves had quieted, he was beginning to feel exultant. Marta had saved them.

There was a seat. Ann bought it, then remembered that he had been robbed and turned over to him most of the money Irv had given her. They shook hands at the gate and he waited till the 'plane rose from the field, then drove back to town.

He must head Irv in the right direction. But he couldn't think about Irv. His mind raced with this ninth-inning chance, this reprieve one minute short of midnight. A chance given them by Marta Penfield at the very moment when she had stopped them cold. And also he steamed with immense resentments. He had possessed her lips, an unspoken promise had been made him—and the declared lover had been made a complete gull. Any other treachery would have been legitimate, but not that one. Somewhere on her flight, Marta was relieving her own tension with recurrent bursts of laughter at a man whom she had kissed into trustfulness. Well, let her laugh. And, he thought simply, let her vanish as wholly as she wants, and may her liberty be sweet.

There was a tap on his shoulder and the police chief was saying, "We ain't fooling, Jack. You get out of town or you'll watch our fireworks from my gaol." Scott swore at him and hurried on.

A moment later, as he turned into the hotel, someone else tapped his shoulder. It was Bert Hagen, the truck driver, and Bert Hagen had clad himself in the holiday costume, had put on a yellow shirt and woolly chaps. He was charged with the joy of Wild West Week and he began issuing invitations. "How's to let us take you to the rodeo this afternoon, Doc? I been looking for you—thought you might be a candidate for a party, now your trips's got bust up. We can stay at the fairgrounds, eat some barbecue, give the games a roll, find us some strip-tease acts, and watch the fireworks."

"Thanks, no. I'm getting out of town right away. Sorry——"

"Aw, get the booster spirit, Doc—here's a chance to kick up your heels. You're among friends. You ain't even got anyone to check up on you now your wife's gone home——"

Instantly Scott had him by the shoulders. "How do you know she has?"

"Don't get mad—I seen her. Took my sister-in-law down to the depot—she had to go home to Rock Springs. Presidio Express, the same train your Missus got on. I seen her get on it.

"The Presidio Express——" There was such a train: he had memorized it from the time-tables. It left at midnight. He sank his fingers into Bert Hagen's arm. "You're sure it was my wife? How can you be sure?"

"Didn't she help patch me up? Has she got a face a guy forgets between drinks? Hey, Doc, guess who else is on that train." Awe came into Bert Hagen's face and he said reverently, "The hero, Eugene Penfield in person. I stood damn' near as close to him as I am to you——"

The words came crashing through Scott's shock and got themselves understood. But understanding quadrupled the shock. "You're crazy!"

"I seen him when I come back into the depot. Nobody could mistake him, Doc—could you? I wanted to ask him to shake hands, but I didn't have the nerve. I went right up to him, though, and I followed him. I wasn't six inches from him when he bought a state-room to San Francisco. I followed him right out to the train——"

Scott turned and ran. For a full block he ran blindly down the crowded pavement, bumping into people, careening off a fire hydrant. He stopped, the street rotating in his eyes. A pitchman thrust at him a board covered with souvenirs of the picturesque West. Scott pushed him away.

The chief of police had refused to believe him once. Another story, a still wilder story, would land him in gaol.

The Presidio Express. It had been at Ogden early this morning. Elko at about half past two. Reno around ten tonight. There would be other stops in between. Marta was on that train. Gene Penfield, Penfield had found her.

She had said "shoot him through the head" with complete belief. Escaping from Scott Warner, who at worst would only have taken off her mask, she had walked straight into the hands of Gene Penfield, who had somehow picked up her trail and who she believed would kill her. She was on a train with him. Or her body was. Or had been.

The chief of police would simply put him in gaol. There must be a sheriff. Thank God, he had not got round to reporting Marta's disappearance to the sheriff.

* * * * *

At the airport the little thug named Berg came into the smoking-room where Taylor Damon stood at a window. They watched the plane gather speed down the runway and take the air. They saw Scott Warner turn from the gate and get into a taxi. They went out and got into another one.

"No, that ain't the dame," Berg said. "This one is small and blonde. The dame was tall and black-haired."

"Of course it isn't."

Damon did not know who this girl was. It was enough that she was not Marta Penfield. He had made some fatal miscalculation. And he was in a town where he had no help except one petty thug and perhaps another one by afternoon. No information.

He could not possibly have miscalculated. He had expected to find Warner here, and Warner was here. But he had been staying at the hotel with this small blonde.

"Better let me lick this guy up, boss," Berg said.

"How would you?"

"He's got that station-wagon at this garage on Laramie Street. I can pick him up. After he gets it. I'll turn him over anywheres you say."

"Just don't lose sight of him," Damon said. "I'll want him all right. But he wouldn't do me any good now. He's got to find the girl for us."

"Peticic, he'll be here today——"

Damon motioned him to shut up. . . . The emergency was as critical as possible. This morning neither Denver nor Silvertip had had any word from Penfield. This was the third day he had been missing—and that might wreck everything. And Damon himself had miscalculated—some item of information was missing—he had erred. He was alone, except for a petty thug, he could learn nothing, he was hours and miles from all information—and time was running out. That woman had been Marta Penfield. It was certain that she had been with Warner. Therefore Warner knew where she was now. Unquestionably Warner was already putting her to use. If Penfield's madness was not enough, there was a chance that Warner might wreck everything—at any moment. Damon coldly faced the possibility of failure.

Berg slipped out of the taxi, having spotted Warner on the pavement ahead, and Damon drove on to his hotel. No 'phone calls. In his room he spread out the noon edition of the *Hitchcock Herald*. On the front page he found a New York story which said simply, and very starkly, that today's *New York Globe* would say that Governor Custer would presently announce the appointment of Eugene Penfield to the Senatorship left vacant by the death of the late Tom Fetterman.

Custer would say nothing about anything until he was told to. He had been told to say nothing about Penfield. Penfield had not been located and might accurately be said to have disappeared. . . . The *Globe* was Irv Barney's paper. Wherever Damon had miscalculated, then, he had been right in calculating that something dangerous was going on. It was well prepared, widespread, expert—and unfolding. It was for keeps.

The 'phone rang, and Berg said, "Boss, he's in the sheriff's office."

Could Warner have seen Damon? Or recognized Berg? No—impossible.

"What's he doing there?"

"How can I tell?"

"Find out."

But in a strange town, without organization, without more time than could be spared, he could not find out anything worth knowing.

Damon had not often had the experience of being unable to take action. He had it, without pleasure in it, for the next two hours. He could patiently analyse what he knew. He could patiently try to work out what he did not know. And also he could face the cold possibility that it might become necessary to abandon the Senatorship of Gene Penfield. Which might easily mean losing years, with the risk of losing everything.

Then Berg was on the 'phone again, a little excited. "He got a seat on the 'plane to Reno. He bought it from a guy for a hundred dollars. It's leaving now."

Berg should have stopped the 'plane. But you must not ask too much from mere thugs. "When is the next 'plane to Reno?"

"It would be tonight, but they got to run this one in two sections. The other leaves in twenty minutes. You can make it."

"Get two seats."

"Suppose I can't."

"Warner did—you'd better."

* * * * *

Early morning. The town, Marta knew, was Ogden. She could see buildings, higher roofs, a radio mast, slanting streets, mountains beyond. For an hour the Presidio Express had been motionless on a spur, a hundred yards from the nearest track. Beyond that track were many others, and down one of them trains, full of soldiers or packed with military equipment, kept passing at short intervals—a division was moving. Nobody came near the Limited. Sometimes a car-washer or some other railway employee passed at a distance. Whenever one did, Marta pounded on the window and screamed "Help!" Nobody heard her, nobody looked more than casually in this direction. No one in the train could have heard her at any time or someone would have investigated. The corridor door of her bedroom was locked from outside. The connecting door was locked from Gene's side.

So you could buy a porter and a conductor. Probably Gene Penfield could buy an entire railway.

She heard Gene come back to his bedroom. The connecting door opened, he came in, and the porter was behind him. She started screaming. Gene put a hand over her mouth and held her, from behind. "When you're willing to stop yelling, you can have breakfast," he said. Then over his shoulder, "Just bring breakfast—anything to eat."

"I don't like this yelling, mister," the porter said. "Somebody'll hear it and get nasty. Can't you shut her up?"

"She can't help it. If the conductor can get a doctor, we'll put her out for a while."

He released her, but stood in front of her when she lunged towards the open door, saying, "Get the conductor here." Gene said, "All right, get the conductor." He shut the door. There was no expression on his face. Except the metallic shine in his eyes which had startled her last night. "Give me some clothes!" she demanded.

The blue night-gown was torn. The bruises on her shoulders were from his hands, but those on her shins were probably her fault. At intervals during the night he had grabbed her and held her motionless, but he had never so much as slapped her. Sometimes the opaque eyes had suggested he was going to kill her right then—but he hadn't. Now he went into his room and came back with the cheap *négligé* she had bought in Hitchcock and the compact from her handbag. The bag itself, her travelling-bag, the clothes and shoes she had taken off—everything had been taken from her.

The conductor came in, and Gene said, "I'm sorry, but maybe she'll be quieter if you'll listen to her."

Her throat fogged with tears, and desperation made her almost voiceless. "You've got to let me off this train—he's keeping me here by force. I'm Marta Penfield. People have been looking for me for years."

"I see," the conductor said indulgently. "We'll take care of you."

She hunched a shoulder out of the *négligé*, stretched out a shin. See! You don't dare help him—you'll go to gaol for life. Get the police here, get anyone here—anyone will recognize me. Even if you think I'm crazy, you've got to."

"We'll take care of you," the conductor said. "You're with friends, Mrs. Sands—Mrs. Penfield. Try to rest. Try to compose yourself."

Her hands thrashed at him, but Gene forced her back on the bed, saying, "I'm sorry. It seemed best. You can't do anything." Her throat swelled and she could not scream, could only grate, "You can't—the police would know about me."

The conductor said, "It's pitiful, Mr. Sands. Try to quiet her—she may hurt herself. You've been able to make arrangements for an ambulance?"

"I think so—at Truckee."

They turned away, and Marta leaped for the door. They caught her, lifted her to the bed, and went into the other room and locked the door. She hadn't had a chance. Gene Penfield could buy anyone or anything.

It was the most loathsome of indignities to scream, to make a show of yourself, to struggle almost naked. She determined to stop. . . . The train began to move, the town to fall away behind. Gene came through the door again.

"That should convince you it won't get you anything. There's breakfast in here, if you want to eat."

She certainly would eat. He watched her with that oddly metallic gaze. When she had finished, he opened the door again and she went back to her room, where the porter had remade the bed while she was gone. The lock clicked behind her.

She had got one bit of information: that he had been led to Hitchcock by a 'phone call from Denver to Ann Sloane. He had let that slip in one of the gusts of rage that had shaken him—and it meant that Dixon Gale's murderer had had Dixon Gale's fiancée watched for three years. Denver would mean Scott Warner's man, Barney, but she could not tell if Gene knew that. She had guessed that he did not know that Henry Hammond was Scott Warner. In one of those violent moments he had spoken of 'the man you're living with', and 'your lover'.

But far more valuable than the guess or the single item of information was a knowledge that the night had brought her. Time, self-respect, or perhaps even Scott Warner, had destroyed her fear. She was not afraid of dying, she was not afraid of Gene Penfield. Every scream she had uttered, every taunt she had flung at him, every struggle, every break for the door, had been deliberate—an effort to defeat him, not panic. She was going to ruin him. She might not live twenty-four hours. she might not live six hours, but she would ruin him for ever.

'He's lost already. Just by having been alive all this time, I've ruined him. He's lost, nothing he can do will save him. He'll know that soon, if he doesn't now.'

Exhaustion crumpled her suddenly and she slept. She woke for a while and thought vigorously, slept again, woke and thought, slept. It was past noon with the Nevada desert flowing by outside when she woke for good, her mind clear, her nerves calm. She thought instantly: Truckee—that's the nearest way to Silvertip. He was making a desperate gamble against inexorably shortening time to get her to Silvertip and final secrecy. That meant she was safe on the train. She was safe anywhere short of Silvertip. Of course, he would not dare to do anything before that. If she could stay on the train! Or if she could do anything at Truckee. Any kind of scene. Any noise.

Scott Warner would have all day and up to nearly midnight. This train would get to Truckee a half-hour short of midnight. But meanwhile Scott would have the police of all the West looking for Marta Penfield. And all the photographers, all the newspapermen.

She had left him no clue at all. If she had, she would have given him a noose for Gene Penfield's neck. If Scott could know that she was on this train! He would leave nothing uninvestigated—she yearned towards the telegraph wires, towards a 'plane overhead.

When he came in again, she was icy and contemptuous—as much so as one could be in a *négligé*.

"It would have been better if you had died," he said.

"I didn't, and that stops you for ever. Senators can't be murderers, still less Presidents. Your fantasies are childish. You can't sink the body in the Truckee River or Lake Tahoe, can you? You can't bury it by midnight under a pine and quick-lime is just silly, and an automobile accident would just give me away. You're just a drugstore conspirator, Gene. You haven't any mind and there's nothing you can do."

Definitely, his eyes were queer. He said, "You'll be committed. To an insane asylum. You'll spend the rest of your life where it won't make any difference what delusions you show. You got in the way of events. They have obliterated you."

"You ought to let your owner think for you," Marta said. "You're just a good-looking athlete. Taylor Damon could have saved you from murdering your only friend. Taylor Damon could show you that you're licked now, merely because I wasn't dead."

His arm went round her neck, under her chin. He didn't choke her, he only stood there uttering vileness in epithets and accusations. Her temples pounded, but when he dropped her she said, "You're licked if you kill me. You're licked if you don't. You're just licked. You haven't got twenty-four hours of freedom left. Commit me? Maybe. But you'll end in a lethal chamber with cyanide in your lungs."

His face was collapsing into formlessness. Rage became frenzy, frenzy became madness, and he was probably going to kill her now. But the lines came back except that his eyes were fiery, and he turned and went out. He wasn't crazy. He was just—Penfield.

She could see Scott coming out of the drug, could see his anger, his frantic phone call to a man named Barney. Scott rushing to the police-station and the newspaper across the street from their hotel suite. Already Marta Penfield had been brought back from the dead for the newspapers of all the United States. At this moment, while the train slid quietly through desolation, millions of people were looking for her. . . .

And Gene would not know, since he did not know about Scott! He would take her off the train and not know that he was awaited. Today was Saturday. He had reached Hitchcock sometime late on Friday. That meant he had got his report from a watched telephone line no earlier than Thursday. Could he perfect arrangements, buy doctors and ambulances drivers and a sanatorium, in so little time? It was an evil, forthright plan, but it must have a thousand holes in it. And, wholly unknown to him, Scott Warner was at this moment arranging to defeat it altogether.

That had been Scott's idea from the beginning—and his use for her. Gene Penfield had been created by publicity. Now he was going to die of it.

The afternoon wore out in the hypnotic lethargy of the train, which was at once a dungeon and a sanctuary. The room in which she was confined as a madwoman was a little room in which no harm

whatever could befall her. And outside, Scott Warner's engines of publicity, the newspapers and the radio, were steadily contracting towards the Presidio Limited as it sped through the desert.

A few minutes after five, the train slowed for a town which she knew to be Winnemucca. A few moments after it stopped at the station she heard a muffled voice—she took it to be the porter's—speaking urgently beyond the connecting door. Just a dim sound, not words. She pressed against the door but could make out nothing—and the door swung in, knocking her off balance. It banged shut and Gene lifted her and threw her face down on the bed and threw himself on top of her. She fought furiously and tried to scream. But his legs clamped tight round hers, his weight pinned her down, one forearm came under her chin and locked across her throat, and his other hand pressed so hard against her mouth that she could make no sound.

She tried to force him away, to squirm, to roll. She tried to bite and claw. She used the last atom of her strength, but was held motionless and silent, half strangled, and suddenly she was spent, limp, gasping for breath, paralysed. His breathing was laboured; his muscles were like rock; his weight was immovable. Her ears roared, her eyes saw nothing. She thought someone was shouting in the corridor, but that might be her own throat. Her mind darkened. She was going to faint, she was going to die. Finally the weight was gone, no one was holding her down, the train was moving.

Some time later she could sit up. He had gone back to his bedroom. She swayed dizzily to a mirror. Pale, haggard, but unbruised, though her throat was scarlet. She collapsed on the bed again. She was inert, only half conscious. Then she was restored, vitalized by a realization.

The episode meant that Scott Warner had located her on this train. He had got his agencies to work. They had missed at Winnemucca. But they would try again. He was catching up with her. Gene was licked this afternoon, tonight—this moment!

Marta waited, her nerves electric, while night came on. Just at darkness the train stopped at some station she could not identify, but, though she was on fire with expectation, nothing happened.

What was he thinking, beyond that door? What steps was he taking against the danger he had certainly recognized but could not possibly understand?

The door opened and Gene threw in some of her clothes. He said, "Get dressed," stood for a moment, then closed the door. The moment was enough to show that his eyes had changed—for the worse.

With intense satisfaction she got dressed. Barefooted, in a nightgown, you not only lacked dignity but were without force and decisiveness. The underwear from Petit Marais, the slip and stockings from Hitchcock, the tan blouse and dark suit from Bemidji—her history in garments. No shoes. A crazy laughter rocked her: they always keep

my shoes. But, dressed, she was a woman again, she was active, she was ready for—for whatever might be necessary. She washed carefully, did her hair, made up her cheeks and lips.

He came in again, gave her her shoes, gathered up the night-gown and *négligé* and toilet articles, stood looking round with intent eyes, and went out.

Through another hour she was a jelly of anxiety, of ignorant excitement, of fearful anticipation. But she was able to hold herself quiet, to fight down hysterics, because one thing was certain—that he had been thrown off his plans. They were now nearing the inexorable test; the last handful of minutes was running out. He had certainly lost. It was now clear that she might lose as well. It would come at Truckee. They would reach Reno in about half an hour, Truckee was a little more than half an hour past Reno.

He came in. "We're getting off," he said.

At Reno? Not at Truckee? Then whatever had happened at Winnemucca had forced him to abandon the ambulance, change the hasty plan, work up something even more hasty. He was extemporizing. . . . She had as much chance as he did—almost.

The train slowed. They were not yet to Reno, for outside the window there was only blank darkness. Then it stopped. Grasping her arm, Gene took her into his room. The porter was picking up her bag and his. "Get everything," Gene ordered him. The conductor came in, looking fearfully over his shoulder before he shut the door.

"Scream if you want to," Gene said.

Scream? Not with the Penfield preparations already overturned. It was simplest to trust to Scott.

"Grab her if she moves—I'll choke her," Gene said.

The porter went ahead, the conductor followed behind them; silently the four walked down thirty feet of corridor to the vestibule. The porter raised the platform and slid, with the bags, into darkness. Gene impelled her downward. There was a scent of oil smoke, and cold mountain air filled her lungs. Her feet scraped gravel.

"By the fence," Gene said.

Gripping her shoulder, he forced her down the embankment and across whitish ground. There was a fence and the glimmer of a road marker and in the dark beyond she could see a stretch of paved highway and a parked car. The porter tossed the bags over the barbed wire, climbed over, stowed them in the car. Gene lifted her over the fence. She stood there, saying nothing.

The porter said, "Thanks, mister," climbed back across the fence, headed towards the lighted train. The conductor called softly, "Good luck, Mr. Sands," and followed him.

They stood side by side. Complete darkness and complete desolation were round them, except that high and far away a beacon flashed and circled. There was the soft sound of the platform being closed. In a few seconds the train began to move. The air was the thin, cold air of her own country.

Marta looked at the motor-car. There was no one in it. And at that moment Gene Penfield struck her on the jaw and she went out.

CHAPTER SIX

IRV BARNEY DINED ON MOUNTAIN TROUT TAKEN WITH A NET FROM A TANK in the window. He ordered a green salad, in the pretence that its components could have come from Colusa County, and a half-bottle of viciously acid wine, on the ground that he had passed that vineyard on his way to Ann Sloane's. A week ago yesterday afternoon he had said good-bye to Ann in her little town, and he thoughtfully added that if he made the rules she was the one girl in the United States who looked satisfactory in blue jeans trousers. A week ago last night he had taken the 'plane to Denver from the Sacramento airport. 'So now here he was in Sacramento again.

In the conspiracy business you certainly covered a lot of territory. And it was uphill all the way. Last week Ann had been around; she wasn't now. Last week it had still been possible to kid yourself that you were going to get somewhere exposing the dirty names; now you had to realize that you had only been running a bluff and it hadn't worked. Irv was fat, frayed, and frustrated. Anyway, the trout was good.

In Sacramento you could remember nostalgically that good old American institution, the Vigilance Committee, and that useful but discarded American custom, assassination. It would have saved a lot of effort if somebody had yanked Gene Penfield over a dead pine with a rope. Irv didn't have a rope or even a pine, and so, swearing tuncfully, he ploughed towards the nearest newspaper, which he thought must be the *Post*. Maybe he ought to pause bare-headed for two minutes, in reverent recognition of the fact that this was Marta Penfield's home town.

The *Post* had built a magnificent new plant two years ago, but already the glass brick smelled just as stale as any newspaper. Locating the telegraph room by instinct, Irv stood at a teletype machine and pawed through yards of carbon copy. And a small, weather-stained, rotund man whose bald head glared above a green eyeshade came in, stared at him, and said, "Oh-oh! Then the mayor and the welcoming committee and the bunch of roses must have missed you. Come along." It was Charlie Pond, and legend said that when the Gold Rush reached California in '49 it had found Charlie running a newspaper there and already eighty-four years old. Charlie took Irv tenderly by the arm and led him down a corridor, pausing at the city-room door to call, "Hey, John," and beckon to a young man. "This is an old Seeing-Eye case, Irv Barney," Charlie said, and waved them on to a dignified door marked "Managing Editor". Entering, Charlie said, "I found this lousing up our telegraph room." The managing editor was

an efficiency product named Wright, who had an urge to live up to his name. He said, "Hello, Irv. That *Globe* feeler about Penfield being made Senator couldn't possibly be anybody but you. All right, give."

Irv sat down. "No, you buy. Who got anything from the good Governor Custer?"

Wright pawed through a pile of takes from the teletype. "He treated himself to a Press conference. In the first place, the *Globe* is lying. In the second place, when he appoints a Senator, he'll announce it, you won't. Talks a little like our Governor."

Glancing through the flimsy, Irv couldn't make out that Governor Custer was either mad or worried—but would bet that he was both, plenty. "Well, you learned at night-school to get a statement from Penfield, so probably you did. Is he honoured?"

"We're saying that Mr. Penfield could not be reached," Charlie Pond said. "I sent John here up to Silvertip. Couple other papers got the same idea. Mr. Penfield wasn't at Silvertip. Okay, Irv, you sent up that balloon for some reason. What was it?"

Irv gazed pensively at the young reporter. "The hero of the American people wasn't at Silvertip. . . . Yeah. Or was he?"

"I asked round a little," John said. "I don't think he was."

Irv grunted. "Didn't night-school tell you what to do next? The Professor should have told you to wire your correspondent to see if Custer's got him in the wash-room at the capitol. . . . What's a free and enlightened Press been sayin' about my exclusive story?"

The managing editor started to get mad, but Charlie Pond said, "Aw, he's a genuis, don't queer his act. We're not hurrying you, master. Sure, you lit a bonfire. Take a look at it—we'll wait with our hats off."

The *New York Times* would have a leading editorial solemnly warning Custer against a discredited prophet. The *Herald Tribune* would treat the story as a rumour, but an ominous one. The teletype showed that lots of papers were aroused. Some were fulminating against Custer, others reviewing the pre-war prophecies and advice of Gene Penfield—and the Corse papers were saying nothing at all. . . . Irv felt just fine and would bet that neither Penfield nor Taylor Damon liked the view in the least.

The managing editor said, "We're just newspapermen, Barney. We don't sit at the centre of the web taking Mr. Roosevelt into our confidence. Either you've got something or you haven't. What have you got? Or what are you up to?"

"How far is it from here to Silvertip, son?" Irv asked the reporter.

"Hundred and twenty-one miles, door to door."

"Just a few minutes' drive for a Californian, huh? Who told you the hero wasn't there?"

"The Honourable Frank Sumter."

"Oh?" Irv squinted at the editor. "Your boy gets met by the

keep-America-from-fighting-Britain's-war ex-Congressman two thousand miles from home. You don't smell anything? The hero ain't home. You still don't smell anything? Where'd you learn the newspaper business, Mr. Wright?"

"The Penfields have got houses all over the West——"

"Sure, and enough lame-duck appeasers to man' em all, maybe, but Penfield ain't there. He's in Custer's gents' room, waitin' to be sprung. . . . I was in Denver when Tom Fetterman died. Taylor Damon, he was too. Now Damon ain't in Denver—and you don't see any statement from him in all this pile of happy thoughts. Our hero was at Silvertip a few days back. Now old Tom's dead, he ain't there any more. Want me to spell it out for you?"

"Oh, that line——" Mr. Wright began. Irv said belligerently, "Yeah, exactly that line——" but Charlie Pond interrupted him. "We heard there isn't a Santy Claus and we've got a good idea how babies come. Nobody has to tell us that Gene Penfield in the Senate would be a medium bad stink, if you're right and he's going to be——"

"Only you won't get out on a limb and say so, huh?"

Charlie sighed. "I'm eight times as old as you are—I don't try to be a Sphinx any more. What limb? He won't be Senator from California——"

"You'll think he is when he begins to beller about how we got to pull the fleet back to San Francisco Bay, Pearl Harbour was just a regrettable misunderstanding produced by administration treachery, and stop spending the taxpayer's money on a New Deal war—oh, the hell with you," Irv said. "I tell you Penfield is Taylor Damon's front. Senator Penfield! President of the America for Peace Federation. The expert who proved that Russia had no air force. The prophet who had England out of the war by January 1941, and no bomb can ever be dropped on Germany. We got to join Germany because the Chinks will join Japan—hell, you don't run a newspaper, but you read them, don't you——"

"Nice going, but no dope," Charlie said. "Sure, we read your piece when it came off the wire. We read it twice. We said hot stuff, and maybe Irv's got hold of something. But it looks like you haven't, and we've got to have something before we'll get out on any limb for you——"

Irv banged on the desk. "Don't have to go to sleep, do you? What's this bright boy doin' here listenin' to us? Why ain't he out workin'? Why don't you find Penfield? Why don't you smoke out Sumter? Got anybody who can write an editorial sayin' that the United States Senate won't receive a known traitor——"

"Just prove us up a traitor," Charlie suggested.

Irv said thinly, "All right, I'll fix it for you. You just sit here on a nice fence for twenty-four hours more, ready to hist your fat rumps either way. What do you suppose I stirred 'em up for? What do you use to think with? Inside twenty-four hours he will be Senator, or if he ain't, then there's the story you think you want. You make

me ashamed of the newspaper business." He took a cigar from Mr. Wright's breast pocket and bit off the end. "This is Marta Penfield's home town, ain't it? She's got an aunt and a sister livin' here still, out in a big old house no more'n two miles from where we sit bein' highbrow journalists. And I bet if I told you that she's still alive, on the loose, and raisin' hell, you'd just send John out to get a statement from her aunt."

"No," Mr. Wright said, "we'd refer you to Andy Smith. We created a department with a permanent editor to handle that story. We get it about four times a week."

Irv growled, but before he found adequate words the 'phone on Mr. Wright's desk rang. Wright answered it, looked surprised, said, "Yes, right here," and turned to Irv. "One of your touts. Find out what's hot for the fifth race."

Nobody knew he was in Sacramento. "Barney speakin'," A thousand volts hit him when the unmistakable voice of Ann Sloane said, "Oh, Irv, I'm so glad!"

"Where are you, honey?" His audience raised their eyebrows and Irv scowled, but Ann said, "Right here in Sacramento—at the Sutter House. I found out you were registered there. I know you'd be at some newspaper." Her voice was excited, hurried, breathless. "Irv, did Scott Warner reach you?"

"Not a word. He's probably pokin' behind sagebrush, still lookin' for the lost."

"He's on the next 'plane—he'll be right here in another hour. Irv, hurry! He was supposed to tell you. Look, we've got the answer to everything. You've got to get me a permit from the governor, or the army——"

"Back off and take a long breath, honey. Now, what have you got?"

"Everything. All the answers. You've got to hurry, Irv. I've got to get hold of a man. Oh, don't sit there asking questions——"

"Okay, honey, I'm startin'," Irv stood up. "All right, pals. I know a story when it kicks my shins. Probably unfits me for the newspaper business in California. Stay here and print papers for the Epworth League. Maybe send John out to see if there's anything in the rumour that Lee surrendered. Tell the day-shift to expect me. I'm comin' back in the morning and show you how we handle news and build circulation."

He stalked out and he didn't give a damn. He had set fire to Governor Custer's shirt-tail and the flames were spreading fast. Burn Taylor Damon's fingers damn' soon. That was pleasant and important but, at the moment, infinitesimal beside the fact that in some way, no matter how, Ann had got to Sacramento.

* * * * *

Marta's eyes opened to darkness and something was tied across her mouth. Her entire body was sore and she had a violent toothache.

She tried to touch it but could not move her hands. The effort exhausted her and she lay still. She was in a moving motor-car, an open car with the top down. She was lying slantwise, half off the rear seat, and she couldn't move her feet, either. She realized that they were tied. Her feet were tied! So were her hands.

She remembered the train stopping. He had taken her to a motor-car and then everything was cut off. He must have hit her. On the jaw. That was the toothache.

Thin, cold air came through the handkerchief over her mouth—if it was a handkerchief. She was shivering. Her legs were cold—circulation shut off. She tried to move them and discovered that she had no stockings on. Probably her ankles were tied with one stocking and her hands with the other. Her mind sharpened—you were supposed to tie their hands behind them, but hers were tied in front. She strained her wrists, trying to twist and turn them, trying to stretch the knots. They hurt so that she nearly groaned. Who would have thought that a stocking could be so strong? She must not thresh around, she must not be heard.

Between times, when her muscles got spasmodic, she had to think. He had chosen Truckee for his rendezvous; it was only about twenty-five miles from Silvertip. From Reno it was a little under forty miles by one route, something over sixty by the other. This was a rough road and he was driving slowly. That meant the shorter road. She knew it by heart.

She was twisting her wrists when the car stopped and she slid forward to the floor. She heard his door open—and lay limp. Light from a flashlight passed over her eyelids; he was looking at her. He put his hands under her shoulders—she did not flinch. He lifted her—she remained dead weight. The flashlight played over her again—she did not move when his hands fumbled behind her head. He untied whatever was covering her mouth, got out, got behind the wheel, started the engine.

That meant that he felt safe. When the car started, Marta opened her eyes. The lights were swaying across oak brush on both sides of the road, which was level here. A moment later it crossed a small, noisy creek and she recognized the log bridge. About five miles back, then, he had turned off the road that led through the national forest and about two miles back had reached Penfield land. He was on the estate. In a mile or so they would begin to climb.

He had done it—had got away clean. Scott Warner's posses, combing trains and stations for her between Winnemucca and Reno, would not find her. Finally they would decide that Scott was misinformed or lying, and would quit looking for her. And Scott would decide that she had slipped off that train far to the eastward. Whatever he might decide to do, it would be the wrong guess. He too had made his trial and had failed.

She had been right from the beginning. No one could stop Gene Penfield.

He was taking her to Silvertip. He could keep her there as long as necessary—with complete immunity. He could perfect whatever plan he had—swear whatever falsehoods, buy whatever doctors and nurses and deputies his plan required. . . . It came into Marta's mind with iron impersonality that the briefest way out for him was by so far the best way that he could never have intended any other. Or, if he had intended the asylum, then the very emergency which Scott's pursuit had created had given Gene a better and a final opportunity. She was the person who knew that he had killed Dixon Gale—from the beginning he had intended to kill her. If he hadn't, he did now. And it was safe.

Marta Penfield had been dead for nearly three years. Only Scott Warner and his friend Barney knew that she was not dead. What about the conductor and the porter? Since they had been bought, they must keep silent to protect themselves. And, though they had been bought, they might not know who had bought them or, at least, who she was. Scott and his friend might publish to the whole world the word that she was alive—but they could not produce her and the world would only laugh. She was dead—it would be easy to keep her dead. Far easier than to buy even the most purchasable of sanatoriums. . . . That was what she had seen in his eyes on the train.

Relaxing and then tensing her wrists, straining the knots and then pausing to let the pain recede, Marta faced the certainty of death. She had about eighteen miles to live. Or a little less.

The road was a mere trail, and would be no better up to within a couple of miles of the lodge. It was used by the wagons and trucks of the cattle ranch, which was in this part of the preserve. It began to climb a mountainside by long switchbacks. He knew it even better than she did, but it would absorb his entire attention.

A steel spur, over which one of the collapsible ribs of the motor-car top fitted when it was raised, dug into her upper arm. Turning, she forced it between her forearms and tugged the stocking down against it. Her wrist agonized and the stocking slipped off the spur. With infinite slowness she eased the spur between two of the knots. It slipped out. It slipped out ten times, twenty times, while she fought back sobs of frantic impotence.

The car crossed a ridge and dipped down, the lights running through timber. A couple of miles farther it started up another grade. She could feel cold depths to the right of the road. She bent down and tried to keep the knot over the spur with her chin. She got it on again. It slipped off.

The engine laboured, knocking with steep grade and thin air. There was a hairpin bend, and Gene's shoulders moved in the dark. They topped this ridge too, and the lights looked down aisles of great pines in a valley and swung back to the twisting road.

As they reached level ground again the knot caught and held. She pulled, biting her lips against the pain. The knot yielded, widened, slid away—its ends had been too short, he should not have tied that

one. The second came away at once, the third appeared to be impossible. It was impossible. . . . Suddenly she realized that the entire stocking had loosened a little. She twisted her wrists innumerable times, rotating them, working them up and down, in and out. Her hands came free.

They were useless hands, numb and thick. Then she could use them. An inch at a time and without sound, she bent forward, steadying herself by locking her toes under the foot-rest, and fumbled with the knots round her ankles. She got them untied. She sat up, trying to stretch her legs, trying to drive blood into her feet by sheer will-power.

The headlights caught log corrals and a stretch of whitewashed fencing—a big gate. Marta clamped a hand over her mouth and shook with fear—she had almost screamed. This was where another road led off to the ranch buildings, hardly a quarter of a mile away. But a scream would have been fatal. No one would have heard. If anyone had heard, it would have done no good. It would merely have told Gene she had come to.

Of course, that was why he had taken off the gag. He had counted on her screaming.

Threading close hills, the road turned up another grade—the steepest, the crookedest, and the last. On the other side of this ridge it would run through four or five miles of canyon and emerge in the great bowl where the lodge was, with the western divide beyond. . . . Marta sat on the edge of the cushion. She counted turns—two, three, four, each with a sheer drop at the side. The air was resinous and you could see the trunks of immense pines.

This was the last stretch of a continental flight, the last minutes of a long effort—and the fulfilment of all the tormented nightmares of her shadowed years. They were coming true, all those panic visions. In fifteen or twenty minutes.

The road topped the ridge and started down. You could hear gravel loosened by the tyres. He was going down in second gear, nursing the wheel. A level stretch, another dip where he had to use the brake constantly, another flat, another dip.

Steeppness abated somewhat and Gene shifted to third, the car running a little faster. She could see another curve ahead, to the left. Straight ahead of it the mountainside sloped down. In the angle, just off the road, was underbrush, and a tree.

When he started to make the turn, Marta threw herself over into the front seat, at Gene's left, clawing for the wheel. As her body twisted and squirmed she reached it and yanked hard to the left. There was a tremendous shock and she was catapulted sideways into darkness, into brush. She struggled and rolled, stood up giddy and blind. She got behind a tree.

The darkness was absolute and there was no sound. There was no movement, either. Then she could hear the wind on the ridge they had come down from. Gene was not moving. She crept round

the tree . . . to the edge of the brush . . . to the edge of the road.

The car was altogether off the road, canted to the right, the front jammed against that big tree. Marta peered through thick darkness and saw no motion, moved closer, got up to the car, looked over the side. He was not behind the wheel. His feet were on the cushion, his head and shoulders must be under the dashboard. Motionless.

Had she killed him? The door would not open and she could not climb the higher side. She went round and tumbled over the other door, almost on top of him. She found a wrist and felt a thin and ready pulse. Concussion maybe, skull fracture maybe, but not dead.

Something hard in his pocket pressed her shoulder—his flashlight. She turned it on and the visible half of his face was ghastly, but there was no blood. The blued butt of an automatic pistol stuck half out of the door-pocket beside the wheel. She took it—and suddenly had climbed out of the car and was running down the road. Her feet hurt unbearably and she collapsed in the darkness, sobbing uncontrollably. She rolled and shook, she didn't know whether or not she was screaming, crazy lights seemed to be exploding inside her brain. She could think only: 'I can't do any more, I've reached the end.'

She sat up, stood up, went back to the car. Let him lie there—let him live or die. She got her bag from the rear seat. She wedged the flashlight between stones, put on stockings and shoes, put on a sweater under her jacket, got her money, tossed the bag back in the car, walked away. Then she stopped short, in the middle of the road, in the mountain darkness, in silence, in the completely empty world.

It was her turn now: she had done it so far and she could do the rest. She could get back past the cattle ranch before dawn. She could get free—or get so much start that she would have a chance for freedom—before anyone could catch up with her. Whether someone found Gene alive, whether he died. She was not more than a hundred and fifty miles from her own home. Not more than three hundred and fifty miles from Santo Espiritu, where the long masquerade had begun. Not much more than thirty miles from Reno, where Scott's police were looking for her, probably, at this moment. Not more than fifteen miles from a forest ranger or a tourist or a road worker or a cowboy or a sheepman—if she wanted anonymous help. She could avoid recognition, or buy silence if recognized, or call on anyone for help.

She had done it at the last second—she was alive and free and Marta Penfield was still dead. She had only to walk up that road again and across the valley beyond. Or, in the extremity, she had only to hide in the brush through tomorrow and get altogether away the next night. She had not failed the crisis, she had won her fight, she was free.

So Marta Penfield collapsed on the gravel road once more, sobbing. 'I can't do any more!' her protesting mind repeated over and over. No one could ask more. Hadn't she disabled him? Mightn't he die? Hadn't she earned her freedom at the threat of her life? No one had any right to ask more.

She stood up. She was no more than five miles from Silvertip—by the road. But there was the horse camp that she must circle round. Say seven miles. Stick to the road while darkness lasted, then with the earliest light take to the hillsides and some of the little trails she knew by heart.

The appalling truth was that there was no way out for her, that she didn't matter a damn. Scott's job had to be done and she could do it. There was that phrase of Scott's so trite and boastful, 'shoot the moon'. It wasn't trite or boastful any more. Marta was going to shoot the moon. She didn't want to but there was no way out, she had to. Mrs. Penfield was coming home, back from the grave, to bring down the structure of Gene Penfield's plans, to stop him for ever.

She shone the flashlight on her watch. It was twenty minutes past midnight. A few minutes more than two hours ago they had got off the Presidio Limited, a few miles out of Reno. A circuit closed in her mind and she remembered that just a week ago she had lain down to sleep on a canvas cot in Scott's station-wagon, Marie Royce getting safely out of Petit Marais, ahead of Gene's thugs.

Something caught at her throat, but whether it was laughter or a sob she didn't know or care. When you start out to shoot the moon nothing else matters a damn. She started off down the road towards Silvertip, prepared to dive into the underbrush at any noise or light.

* * * * *

Fists clenched in his pockets, Scott Warner stood beside the chief of detectives in the Reno train shed, waiting for the Presidio Express. They, with a plain-clothes man and the divisional superintendent of the railway, would enter the first Pullman and two uniformed policemen would work towards them from the last one. Other officers would be stationed at the exit gate and still others would patrol the far side of the train. Time slid slowly, but in about five minutes now . . .

He had reached Reno about two hours ago. He had only a non-committal identification from the sheriff of Hitchcock County—he had lied furiously to get so much—but the sheriff had taken his information about Marie Royce with complete seriousness and had done his work thoroughly while Scott was *en route*. He found the Reno police expecting him, but sceptical because their Winnemucca colleagues had wired that there was no one on the train who answered the description of Marie Royce. They had gone about their job, however, getting assurance from Fond du Lac that the woman was wanted and notified the railway company what they intended to do. They were metropolitan cops—efficient, quiet, and on their toes.

In the hours since the plane left Hitchcock, Scott had got his emotions under control and given his plans as much precision as his all-inclusive ignorance permitted. You could take your choice: Marta was with Penfield on the train or Penfield had been able to get her off the train. He might have taken to the desert at any time since

last midnight. But Silvertip was his private sanctuary and by far his safest move would be to get her there if he could.

Meanwhile Scott had hired a motor-car, sent a wire to Irv at Sacramento reporting the failure at Winnemucca (there was no way of knowing whether any of those he had sent from Hitchcock had found Irv), and got maps and the most minute directions obtainable about the route to Silvertip. Meanwhile also he had faced the cold possibility that all the frantic action might be useless, might have been useless for hours. Marta might be dead.

If they were on the train, everything must be left to the Reno police—but also everything would be all right. If they were not, two things were possible, though neither one of them promised much that an anxious mind could hold to. Irv would eventually be able to start at least one newspaper looking not for Marie Royce, but for Marta Penfield, and if one started, others would follow. And Scott himself could get to Silvertip and—and what? Start tearing it up with his own hands, doubtless, but probably in vain. If Penfield was on the train and Marta wasn't . . . well, the immediate action could be left to Scott Warner entirely.

The train sighed to a stop with the whispering release of air-brakes, and the four of them leaped into the first car. It was a swift, smooth search—berths, wash-rooms, toilets, vestibules. The chief of detectives radiated quiet authority, the superintendent smoothly apologized to bewildered or angry passengers. Men and women in night-clothes, wakened children, late card-players, solitary drinkers—one by one they were glanced at, referred to Scott with a look, soothed, left behind. Pullman and train conductors joined the procession. From car to car.

"Only this car and the one before it are from Hitchcock," the superintendent pointed out. The chief of detectives—his name was Hart—nodded and said, "We'll see them all." The search went on. . . . But there was nobody worth looking at.

They came out into the train shed. Thirteen passengers had got off the train and been held at the gate. Five of them were Army officers. The others were estimable people, doubtless, but they had no meaning for anyone. Scott's throat was dry, his palms wet, his stomach-muscles shaky.

One conductor sprinted for the station, the other waited impatiently for him to come back. One of them said to the superintendent, "Get us a clearance—we've lost seven minutes." The superintendent glanced at Chief Hart, who said, "Okay, give him a highball." The platforms banged down. The train began to move.

"Guess you had a wash-out, Mr. Warner," Hart said. "Goose-egg at Winnemucca, wire from Lovelock that nobody got off there, wash-out here. I'll give you odds she never was on this train."

Scott said, from the depths, "It wasn't searched till half past five. From midnight to then is a lot of time. A lot of miles, too."

Mr. Hart called, "Arnie!" and a big man in overalls turned back

from the dispatcher's office, which he had been entering. "They change engines here—that's the engineer," Hart explained, and as the big man came up, "You didn't happen to stop anywhere this side of Lovelock, Arnie?"

Arnie nodded. "Bill thought he smelled a hot-box. He thinks so frequent. He didn't. He noted it on the sheet."

"Where was that?"

"Mile 1521. About eight miles out of town, east."

"Anybody get off?"

"Hell, no. Nothin' there but a culvert."

Chief Hart said to Scott, "I'll give you that, if you want it. I can drive you out. He wouldn't find anything. But if you want to promise your chief you've looked for her everywhere——"

That would be fifteen minutes before the train stopped here. Fully half an hour ago by now. It was a possibility. Penfield could have—somehow—got her off the train there. On the other hand, if he had stayed on into Nevada at all, he ought to have gone on past Reno to Truckee, which was nearer Silvertip. Or—could he have detected and somehow eluded the search at Winnemucca and got off, anticipating one at Reno? Scott shook with indecision. There were a million possibilities, all equally good, all equally bad.

He decided. "No. I'll get on my way. Do what you can for me. Keep in touch with all your pals between here and Hitchcock. I'll stir them up as much as I can. I'll be back in a couple of days and we'll get together."

The chief's men scattered but the chief lingered, looking at Scott speculatively under a big light. "You know, Warner, they want this guy she lit out of town with, too." He glanced at a telegram from his pocket. "Name's George Cook. If I went out to pick him up, I'd look pretty hard at you."

Scott said, calmly, "Yes, I've noticed that. Well, I'll be round when you want me, Mr. Hart. Or pick me up at Silvertip—I'm going there. It's in your jurisdiction, isn't it?"

"Part of it's in the sheriff's. Not the main house. That's in California."

They met each other's eyes and there was no telling if Mr. Hart had been joking or in earnest. They expressed mutual thanks and shook hands. Scott got into his hired car and drove away from the station.

He could not see, and would not have noticed, the car that pulled out of the parking space and followed him, fifty yards behind.

He drove to a telegraph office and sent another wire to Irv Barney at Sacramento, reporting this final failure in guarded hints. He had expected answers from Irv to be awaiting him in Reno, but they hadn't been. Doubtless they would be important, but he couldn't wait for them. And yet, was there any possibility that Irv would be any less licked and doubtful than he was? Was there, finally, anything left that either of them could do? Probably not.

He got out his maps. Two routes to Silvertip had been drawn for him. The shorter one was described as bad going at night. But the significant thing was that it was the shorter one. The lonelier one too. Okay.

Marta had been absolutely certain that the thugs at Petit Marais had been Penfield's and had been sent to kill her. Escaping them, she had been absolutely certain that Penfield would kill her if he got a chance. Well, Penfield had had his chance. Wyoming, Utah, Nevada—it made a big and empty space. Ample room for privacy, ample time for murder—and ample time and room for the word Scott's mind stuck at, burial. There had been almost twenty-four hours—the trail was as cold as the night. He tried to believe that Penfield might be taking her to Silvertip, which would give him time still. Time, he thought contemptuously, for what? For some new idiocy and blunder, some grotesque failure to accomplish anything, like every move he had made since he started west for Petit Marais over five weeks ago.

What could he accomplish at Silvertip? What could he accomplish even if he found Penfield there? Nothing. If Penfield was at Silvertip or on his way there, and certainly he was one or the other, he would be . . . alone.

Well, he could get Penfield. The Senatorship of Tom Fetterman, the erudite and secret threat of Taylor Damon, the protection of the home front, the frustration of the appeasement network—it had all come to matter singularly little. The simple truth was that it mattered not at all. He was going to get Gene Penfield, now, or tomorrow, or at the end of whatever time might be necessary—he was going to get him once and for all. But he was going to get him for Marta's sake, not for the sake of the United States.

He could remember a cynical phrase of Irv's, weeks ago, about the amateurs going all out for Dartmouth. Okay, play it straight. He didn't know how it was going to work out, and however it might work out it would be far different from what that little group of innocent and hopeful amateurs had foreseen, but he was going to get Gene Penfield. Or Senator Penfield. Or President Penfield.

He got into his car and sat for a moment before starting out, gazing at the bright lights and gay pavements of what was probably a pleasant town. People were rumoured to have a good time in Reno, and the rumour seemed borne out. Plenty of people were drinking, gambling, dancing, looking at floor shows, and if somewhere the war was killing their countrymen and somewhere else Gene Penfield was on his way home from a job successfully done, the important thing in Reno was that you would get your decree in a week or two. If Marta had divorced Penfield instead of disappearing, everything would have been different. Well, she hadn't. That was her mistake. We made mistakes. We have to pay for them.

He drove off, watching for highway signs. The road led him out of town and presently a fork turned off it and began to climb. They

had told him that it would take between an hour and a half and two hours to get to Silvertip by the back way at night, and had added that the slower he drove the better he would feel about it. He did his best to relax behind the wheel.

This was the last leg, the end of his transcontinental motor-car trip. It was an incredible trip and the most incredible part was that it had begun a week ago tonight, only a week, not a year. He had stopped somewhere in pinewoods and spread blankets on his cot for Marta, who had stretched out on it, completely trusting him, and slept while he drove towards Duluth. He would remember blue sky and blue water, stars and night winds. He would remember many tableaux—early morning sunlight on her sleeping face, her quick mastery of herself when he sprang his trap, dim light from the dashboard on her hands and ankles, her anger and contempt, her laughter and comradeship, rain on the roof of a tourist cabin, her stockings hanging up to dry. Try not to remember a hotel suite at Hitchcock, the falling apart of the world, the warmth of her lips.

The road had been running through a forest, which began to thin. A log arch stood up at one side, flanked by whitewashed boxes, and that, they had said, was where the dirt road turned off towards Silvertip. Scott got out to make sure. A car passed on the forest road, the only one he had seen since Reno. The arch was lettered Silvertip all right, and he got back in and turned down the dirt road, which soon proved sufficiently bad going. Presently he had to drive with great care, up mere ruts that began to climb steeply, with black gulfs at the edge. His mind faded to a hypnotic scrutiny of the road and a background of despair against which there were too many, too fleeting images of Marta. Twice as the car laboured up great steepes in thinning air, he thought he saw the flash of lights below him. Each time he caught only a flash and could not verify it against the darkness. No one would be on this road, anyway. Except possibly Penfield—which would fulfil all his dreams. He must be mistaken, or at most had caught a glint from a ranch house or an aeroplane beacon crazily given back by foliage.

He passed a sizable level space and must be getting near the big house, for at one side were corrals and more ruts leading off. But the road climbed again and now demanded his entire attention. The car barely made this divide and the first part of the descent was precipitous. The grade eased.

In his lights a wrecked car suddenly stood out, just off the road, at a curve, with a deep black gulf beyond.

Scott got out and hurried forward. There was no one in the car. He studied it in the beam of a flashlight. The radiator was bashed in, the hood and fenders crumpled, the windscreen a spiderweb of cracks, one front wheel broken. It was a thorough wreck. But no sign of blood on the ground or in the front seat.

He stiffened and went cold, then leaped into the rear seat. There could be no doubt. The open travelling-bag which was overturned

on the floor, spilling its contents—it was Marta's. The flashlight picked out blue sleazy silk, and that was the night-gown which he himself had bought at Minot. And there was the yellow dress which she had bought at Hitchcock, the unmistakable and heartbreaking little leather case that held manicure instruments.

Half insane, he lumbered through the underbrush beyond the car. No sign, nothing at all. He crossed to the far side of the road and slid fifty feet down the slope, then climbed back, flashing his light everywhere but seeing nothing. He stood still and shouted "Marta!" The name came back from the invisible cliffs, but there was no answer, no other sound of any kind. He called again, repeatedly. Nothing. Just a sloping mountainside deep in desolation, late at night, empty.

1521. About eight miles east of Reno, Penfield had contrived to elude the search at Winnemucca after all; he had been on that train, he had somehow got it stopped just outside of Reno. Marta had got this far. No! All that was certain was that her bag had got this far. Then there had been a wreck. Was the car Penfield's? No matter, Penfield had been in it, and Marta's bag, and possibly Marta, or Marta's . . . body.

The number of the Nevada license burned for ever into Scott's memory. Marta's bag—Penfield had brought it this far. It would prove to be a noose around his neck. But it would not save Marta.

The beam of headlights edged over the ridge above and behind him and began to sway downward. A car—and thank God for it. Scott stood in the middle of the road, damning the slow drift of those lights which seemed to move sluggishly, round too many curves. When they came round the last one above, he began to blink his flashlight and wave his arms. The car approached, slowed, stopped.

"There's been an accident," he said, running up to the driver, his eyes still blinded by the headlights. "I can't find anyone, but you'd better help me look."

"Sure," the driver said. The door opened, the man got out—and something hard was poking Scott in the stomach. "Don't move," the man said, "not even a little."

Instantly Scott swung his fist into that blurred face. Someone in the car shouted, "Don't shoot him." He closed in, wrestling, taking blows in the face and the stomach, hitting fast. The two of them lurched and fought into the headlights. Another man was closing in. Over his antagonist's shoulder Scott saw the face of Taylor Damon. He hit hard, faced about and swung at Damon, coming down on one knee as the other man smashed at his ear. Then he was down flat and someone had kicked him. He grabbed a foot and brought one of them down. Then they both had him, shaking him. The first man, a small man, got his elbows locked behind Scott's elbows and was swearing with the most intense obscenity.

"Where is Mrs. Penfield, Warner?" Damon demanded, coming up close.

Through wrenching pain, Scott said, "You'd like to know, but

you won't." He lurched down and forward, bringing his captor over his shoulder, crashing into Damon. He slugged Damon full in the face and thought that Damon screamed. He leaped for the dark edge of the road and plunged downward. He ran, slid, rolled. There was a shot above him, another one, a third. He crashed through underbrush and down more slope. His foot turned under him and he fell. He stood up. His leg flamed with pain and he came down, his chin ploughing into gravel. A great weight fell on his back. He squirmed furiously, his ears roaring, and went out.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT WAS PAST 2 A.M. WHEN TAYLOR DAMON GOT TO SILVERTIP LODGE. He roused a servant, learned that Gene Penfield had not returned, ordered his colleagues wakened, and went to the room that was always kept ready for him. He bathed and put on fresh clothes, wondering at a mirror whether the abrasion on his cheek had got infected. The future of the world could depend on a microbe as readily as on anything else—and he doused the place with antiseptic. He went down to the enormous room, but, contemptuous of rich men's luxury and display, ordered his assembling companions to the small gun-room.

These were crude instruments, these excitable and wordy men, men who needed sleep, who did nothing coldly. But they were the tools he had to use. Walton Hancock, the Chicago banker, and Frank Sumter, the ex-Congressman, had come here days ago on Damon's orders. Subordinates had arrived from Denver and New York this afternoon. Barry Corse, the owner of newspapers, had come in a few hours ago. . . . Some had dressed, some were in bath-robés, Corse was scrawny in yellow silk pyjamas. Corse was also the most alarmed. He told a sleepy houseman to bring highballs, but Damon curtly cancelled the order. "You haven't got half enough intelligence, sober."

It did not take long to learn their mood and the sum of what they knew. No word had come from Penfield, no one had any explanation of his departure. Everyone was desperate over the delay; Sumter had been scared by the appearance, during the afternoon, of Sacramento newspapermen; Corse was violently alarmed by the *Globe's* disclosure of the plan. He was convinced that someone had been bribed or scared into revealing it.

"Nobody sold us out," Damon said coldly. "But somebody is thinking fast enough to throw us off at a serious moment. The simple fact is, somebody has been anticipating us without our knowing it. It would not be serious if Penfield hadn't chosen to think for himself about something. Now he's out of touch."

He let them wrangle and get angry, knowing it was their nature. He never felt fear or anger—he sought for facts and held by them.

Finally he gave them a fact to shut them up. "This would be merely annoying if we had been able to act fast. We weren't, and there will be agitation, opposition, and finally serious trouble. Tomorrow was the limit. I had decided that if Penfield was back by the time I got here we could go ahead safely. He isn't here. There is no more time and that finishes him. He is now a liability. I've got no further use for him."

They yelped and shouted. He was pulling out the keystone—he had abandoned the entire idea—he had destroyed years of preparation—set them back for months—perhaps lost them the Presidency. Only Penfield could go to the Senate with any chance of going beyond it. Who was there for '44? Was he willing to retire to small bargains and small coin benefits? Was he letting power slip through his fingers? . . . Damon let them release their emotions; people who had emotions had to release them. But finally he grew bored and stopped them.

"Someone has to distinguish between realities and emotions. If circumstances require a plan to be changed, I change it. There are a good many ways to win an election. If Penfield has made himself useless, we'll make use of someone else." He permitted himself a thin sneer. "Mr. Corse has always understood that his talents superbly qualify him to lead the American people. It may be that Mr. Corse will prove right, with my help. If so, we will make him President—if not, we'll create a great man out of someone else. . . . However, I have lost enough time. I will telephone Governor Custer in the morning that he is free to serve his own interests by naming anyone he pleases. I expect you gentlemen to get your nerve back overnight and be prepared to think a little by morning."

They were rebellious but they would not rebel. They could not. Without Damon they were only a noisy group of small politicians. It was Damon who put them within reach of power, who gave them a realistic expectation of being able to rule America. . . . He was saying that perhaps their minds would be clearer if they resumed the sleep he had broken—when, dishevelled and furiously excited, Gene Penfield came into the room. He was limping, he was bruised, his clothes were torn and dusty, and his left arm hung awkwardly at his side.

They clamoured round him. "I wrecked my car," he managed to say. "I walked to the horse camp. I got a horse there and rode it in. I think my arm is broken."

"See if it is broken," Damon ordered. One of them felt and poked and decided that it wasn't. "Then get out and let me talk to him. He may be in time."

He had to confront a man who was just short of frenzy. Penfield's accident had made him almost delirious. His eyes were hot, his voice was strained and high, he could not sit still. Damon wondered if he might be suffering from concussion.

"Sit down, Penfield," he said coldly. "Where have you been?"

"I got back—you needn't bother about anything else. I'm here. And no announcement has been made. Why not?"

"Because you left your post," Damon said, ignoring his passion. "I had decided to announce tomorrow that someone else gets the job. I may yet. Where have you been?"

Penfield grew molten with defiance. Damon sat entirely unmoved, observing what amounted to a phenomenon of nature. That face was bruised and swollen, but it still had the nobility that cameras always caught. As shrillness left that voice it became the melodious and hypnotic instrument that had charmed millions. Gestures of boyish sincerity, facial expressions of intense and sorrowful purity, were natural to Penfield. Even in torn clothes and with an awkward arm, he was the image of the national hero. He was the young crusader, the virgin knight. For years he had been American youth. He always would be: he was arrested development on a national scale.

Also he was a megalomaniac and had to be kept under discipline. He had launched into a speech about his indispensability. ". . . treat me with some realization that I carry all of you on my shoulders. You can sit back spinning pretty cobwebs but they're not even pretty without votes. I win for you or you don't win. You'd better remember that."

"You're a fool," Damon said dispassionately. "The things my clerks write about you are for others to believe, not you. You're nothing but an image, Penfield. You're an ornamental glass ball from a Christmas tree—something I made. Your importance to me is the importance of a few months and no more. Can I work faster with you, or shall I pick up some other glass ball and tell fools that it's the prettiest one?"

He gazed aloofly at the statuesque hero, who at past forty had never reached seventeen in his emotions or got beyond twelve in his intelligence. "I can make an image in tinsel of you," he said. "I can't be sure it won't get smashed. Look here, Penfield. From the beginning it has been certain you'd be smashed if the fools ever suspected that something had tarnished their hero. You've come close before this, but I've saved you. If there is anything shady, anything criminal, even anything unhappily indiscreet that I don't know about, in the past or in this last week . . . well, putting it plainly, before I take the irrevocable step and make you Senator, you had better tell me what it is."

"There is nothing that you don't know. I've practically had to live with you like a bride." The high, dauntless forehead began to corrugate. "I do not have to answer questions. Who are you to hold me to account like a boy . . .?"

Damon waved him silent. "If, later on, anything shows up that you've hidden from me, you'll just be broken tinsel ground underfoot. Twice. By the fools and by me." He advanced an oblique suggestion. "No suspicion of fraud, or misdealing, or violence can be allowed to touch you. If the need for any such thing has developed, let me make

the arrangements. You must not be touched by any kind of suspicion."

He waited. But it was clear that Penfield was only having an inflammation of the ego, he was not hiding anything. . . . Time permitted just one throw of the dice—one throw, win or lose. Marta Penfield was certainly alive, and for the moment safe, but Damon was confident he could take care of her, so long as no one discovered her; so long, especially, as Warner and Barney could not make her public. Warner had been attended to. Whatever connection he had with Barney, it was now broken. And Barney could be handled swiftly, as the dispersed organization began to concentrate again.

It remained extremely precarious. But direct action was best. Face them with an accomplished fact—announce Penfield's appointment. Meanwhile get hold of the woman and either neutralize Barney or crush him, as the need might develop. Damon's fear had been that Penfield's absence meant that he had got some hint or knowledge that his wife was alive. He was now convinced that the fear had been unjustified. Warner had been stopped in time, Barney had never come close, and there was no way in which Penfield could have found out. Except that photograph. But did Penfield look closely at any photographs except his own?

"What about your wife?" If the question did not mean everything to Penfield it would mean nothing at all.

"That has always been a night terror of yours," the hero said scornfully. "A courageous soul, aren't you, Taylor? Don't be afraid of ghosts. Marta is dead."

Damon was satisfied. The hero had no suspicion that she was alive. His absence had been only some secrecy, probably a romantic secrecy, of a grandiloquent fool. "You are worth just exactly your public purity and that's all you'll ever be worth," Damon said. "If it's ever tarnished I'll drop you for ever. At the first hint of it you'll be worth nothing at all."

He was answered only by splendid rhetoric. . . . Well, make the cast. Face the world with an accomplished fact. And patch the holes made by Marta's being alive and by Barney's astute guessing. Make the cast. It would put Damon back where he could master circumstance.

He called in the others and told them that Governor Custer would announce Penfield's Senatorship as soon as he could get him by telephone in the morning.

* * * * *

At about 8.30 Ann telephoned that she had got permission for Dr. Miura to leave the resettlement camp and would bring him to Sacramento. "Okay, honey," Irv said, "I'll meet you at the Sutter House. Or I'll leave a note where to bring him."

No need to tell her that they had lost another round, had lost more than there was a chance of getting back. He had waked this morning

to find half a dozen telegrams from Scott Warner, all of them catastrophic. In an allusive language which used no names, which Scott doubtless thought of as a code, they said that he had located Marta Penfield on a train headed West and had made the incredible discovery—or guess—that Gene Penfield was on the same train. It could not possibly be true. But Scott was not a fool—it had to be true. Also it had to be dealt with. Also there was no way of dealing with it.

That picture in *Spectacle* had been open to all the world, of course. But Penfield had gone to Hitchcock—from Silvertip. No one knew that Marta was at Hitchcock. No one . . . except! Humiliation sickened him. I did it. I said "Hitchcock" over the phone to Ann, from Denver to Sacramento, and Ann said "Marta Penfield." Her line had been tapped. Had been tapped all these years. A careful and thorough man, Penfield.

The telegram from Reno was the worst. *Quarry escaped without trace somewhere east of here. No sign of either one. Getaway absolute. I proceed to headquarters.* Headquarters probably meant Silvertip. What could the idiot do at Silvertip?

Irv lacked Scott's volatility, his flashpoint was high, his anger was well banked. But it was beginning to feel a forced draft. Frustration, accidents, miscalculations, stupid mistakes, failure—he had a limit. He decided that Scott, however idiotic, was right. At Silvertip he could at least raise hell—general and miscellaneous hell. All their plans had failed and all their weapons had proved useless. Okay, it was time to start raising hell, regardless. Irv would stay here long enough to find out what, if anything, this mysterious Jap knew. If he knew anything useful, then Irv would start using it. If not, then he would just raise hell.

It was funny—he had been scared of Damon's brains but never of Penfield. But Damon had just run round aimlessly in the dark, had done nothing, had got nowhere. Whereas Penfield had gone straight and efficiently to the point. He had grabbed the girl. And, somewhere between Hitchcock and Reno, had . . . well, had done enough, had closed that avenue of attack for ever. Everybody had underestimated Penfield.

He found only a morning crew at the *Sacramento Post*. John, the boy reporter, was not there, nor Charlie Pond, nor Mr. Wright. Irv carefully read what the teletypes were saying but found nothing that concerned him. Then he sat down at a typewriter and wrote a cryptic scarehead story predicting sensational developments in the mystery of Marta Penfield. Hints that she was now known not to have died, that her hiding-places of more than two years had been located, that she would soon reappear and make tremendous disclosures, that her disclosures would have a bearing on the United States Senate. He knew his business; it was a fine story.

He would hold it till he found out whether the Jap had anything to say, then he would wire it to the *Globe*. As before, the *Globe*, which knew its Barney, would run the story. As before, once the *Globe*

broke it, others would follow up. Yesterday he had lit a bonfire for Messrs. Damon and Penfield. Today he would light a forest fire for them. He was starting in to raise hell.

Should of done it long before. Nope. It was pure razzle-dazzle, pure bluff. Up to now there had always been some idea you didn't need to bluff. That was over now.

He was sunk in morose thoughts when the signal bells of two rival telatypes rang, practically together. There was just a girl in the telegraph room, some blonde cutie who doubtless was on loan from a high-school paper, and she hurried over. Irv slouched up beside her—read an official statement from Governor Custer that Eugene Penfield had been named United States Senator to fill out the unexpired term of the Honorable Thomas R. Fetterman.

"Well, sister," Irv said, "them bells mean what they say. In our business that's what we call a flash. It's news. Better wake up some of your sleeping beauties. Get somebody here." But at the moment in came Charlie Pond, beautiful in white linen, his few remaining wisps of grey hair plastered down on his gleaming skull, his face benign. "Ah!" Irv said with satisfaction, "here's the patriarch, with his rump still half over the fence. I fake my news, huh? I invite you out on limbs just because I'm fat and indolent? Put on your glasses and see who's Senator." He ripped off a long take and handed it to Charlie. He watched the benevolent face sharpen to alertness. "If you want someone to show you how newspapers are run, I'm still on hand."

"Now we got something," Charlie said tranquilly. "I'll get Wright on the 'phone. Here!" to the girl. "When you don't know about things, take them to the city-desk. Hell, I'll take it." He got started, Irv following him contentedly.

But it was still before breakfast in the city-room too and Charlie simmered in a dignified way while he began to organize for a story. Mr. Wright would hurry down, various private and public dignitaries would be interviewed, a thorough background piece would be assembled from the morgue—and Wright would speak some lines editorially.

"We're a morning newspaper, we sleep while you wait," he crooned. "Hey, even if Clare Luce should get elected, Penfield will give the Senate far more sex appeal than the House. . . . A great man. Suppose the Senate won't seat Senator Penfield—"

"No!" Irv said. "It got home to you! Charlie, you're a deep thinker. Mind like a steel trap."

Charlie looked at him levelly. "So that's what you hid in the woodpile, huh? You aren't just a one-man political hunch. You're the *Globe*, and the *Globe* will front for the administration—piling up stink to spread when he comes to take the oath—"

"I'm the guy that calls the shots," Irv said. "Who told you this was going to break today? Just go ahead and work up some stink."

"The stink is strictly up to Mr. Wright—all I do is get the story."

Here Charlie scowled at another modern newspaper girl, who was saying that someone on the 'phone wanted to talk to an editor. "Well, we got a million editors. I'm an editor."

Charlie picked up a 'phone, listened for a moment, came very much alive, and gestured Irv to take an extension. A precise, clerky voice was saying that this was Silvertip, that the voice was speaking for Senator Penfield. The Senator recognized the desire of the Press for interviews and would come down to Sacramento. The Senator would be at the Palace Hotel at eight o'clock this evening and would talk to all accredited newspapermen who might care to be on hand. "Eight o'clock?" Charlie yelled into the telephone. "This is a morning newspaper. Has the publicity brain forgotten that eight o'clock is midnight on the big time? You want some wire service? Get your man down here by three o'clock." There was a marked silence on the 'phone, then the voice reported with dignity that Senator Penfield would meet the Press at 5 p.m.

Irv cupped a hand over the transmitter, leaned towards Charlie, and said, "Ask to speak to him. See if the beggar is really there."

The request produced hauteur at the other end, but Charlie was a good tough man and had some hauteur of his own. Presently an unmistakable voice, with great music and greater impressiveness, was saying, "This is Senator Penfield speaking . . ." Irv put down the 'phone, stood up, and hurried away.

Charlie Pond caught him downstairs. "You damned fool, Irv! What now?"

Irv pushed him away, then turned back for a moment. "Go run a paper. I hope you know stop-press when you see it. You're going to see a sweetheart."

It had been not so much a lightning flash as the throwing of a master switch: all circuits had been closed at once. Penfield was at Silvertip: That meant that Marta Penfield, if she were still alive, was at Silvertip. But Penfield would have made no public move without Damon holding his hand—so Damon was at Silvertip. Scott Warner had started for Silvertip. But the morning's developments at Silvertip were unfolding with a smoothness that meant mastery, ball bearings, complete assurance. They must have nailed Scott. Scott and Marta Penfield. They had everything taped off and fastened down. They had taken care of Scott. They had taken care of everything.

He remembered saying something about amateurs going all out for Dartmouth. He was a fat man with a limp. He guffawed, out of despair. Funny—funnier'n hell.

There was a momentary dead stop at the sheriff's office, for this was Sacramento County and Silvertip was in Placer County. But as total incredulity and derision began to yield to Irv's methodical plans for swearing out warrants, the sheriff took care of that. Irv could get started and by 'phone the sheriff would arrange to have his friend Steve Updike meet him on the way, with assorted warrants. Specific warrants and John Doe warrants. Throw the book at him.

The sheriff remained a little dazed. "I hope you know what you're doing, mister. If you aren't air-tight all along the line, God help you."

"Yeah," Irv said. "Ten thousand dead or alive and a million years in gaol. Let me worry about that. On the other hand, if you're his man . . ."

"I'm not," the sheriff said, "I hate his guts and I hope you've got him. So does Steve Updike. He ain't a great man on his home range—he's a blue-ribbon hog with delusions of grandeur." He gaped and shook his head and, as Irv departed, was muttering, "Gene Penfield, Marta Penfield, Marie Royce."

"Yeah, funnier'n hell. Well, anything else? Yeah, the Jap. Irv stopped at the Sutter House and wrote a note for Ann Sloane. Then he went out and rented a motor-car.

Hundred and twenty-one miles, door to door. Okay. The chips were down now. Ought to be a big day in Placer County.

* * * * *

Even before the sky began to turn grey it was evident that there were a lot of windows in this place. Three sides of it were windows, in fact, with a porch beyond them down which Scott's gaoler paced desultorily. Once awake in the darkness, Scott did not feel too bad—physically. His whole body ached, his ribs were tender to the touch, so was a lump at the back of his skull, but the only continuous pain came from his left ankle. It wasn't broken, for he could rotate his foot. But it had swollen, it throbbed agonizingly, and when he contrived to pull himself erect it turned under him and he went down with a groan. That had happened before. That, in fact, was what had happened.

Paleness grew against the dark and he could see window-seats along the same three walls. There was a rustic chair in the room and there was absolutely nothing else. Another room behind the wall that had no windows, the door locked. The place was made of polished logs and wide, polished panels.

The man was looking in through a window, at one end. Scott merely sat, hugging the knee of his uninjured leg. The man dissolved away.

Light grew. Scott pulled himself to the long, leather-upholstered window-seat and crawled down it to the far end. Beyond, the porch steps led down, and the gaoler was sitting on the top one. He turned his head, gazed at Scott with incurious, ophidian passivity, spat and looked away.

That was the small man of last night. Also he was one of the two who had come to Gislason's Machine-Shop at Petit Marais. Marta had said his name was Berg. Damon's man, for he had been with Damon last night. Damon had demanded word of Marta. And that meant, absolutely, that Penfield had come to Hitchcock without Damon's knowledge. That was why there had been no Senatorial

appointment. Not only did Damon not know where Marta was, he had been unable to reach Penfield while Penfield was on his way towards Hitchcock.

Wonderful what the mind could do! Wonderful how well you could think when everything was over. Damon had got to Silvertip, for this was Silvertip. Penfield had got to wherever that wrecked car was—and on to Silvertip. And Marta? . . .

This ornate little building was on a ridge that ran, beyond those steps, down to a lower ridge which made the western rampart of a valley. A great valley opening out southward, wider and wider, a vast amphitheatre whose blue shadows were beginning to lighten with brilliant sun. It was inconceivably majestic.

Scott crawled down the long side—that would be the eastern side—of the room. The mountainside fell down steeply here and at the bottom, perhaps a thousand feet vertically and half a mile eastward, buildings nestled in a clearing. The clearing had been made in a forest of giant pines, and it was at the head of a cove which made the northern end of the big valley. There was a great, hotel-like house of logs—Silvertip Lodge. There were fully a dozen smaller buildings. They were deep in shadow, for the sun had not climbed the eastern ridge, though long shafts of gold cut cross upper levels of the forest. There was no smoke, no movement, no sound.

At the far end, the northern end, the ridge fell away somewhat as it did to the south. Perhaps a mile away a kind of saddle was crossed by a road from the west, which showed a loop now and then as it dropped towards the lodge. Still farther on, the ridge curved eastward and climbed, curving round the cove at the head of the valley. The invisible side, the west, must show another ridge or another valley.

Just outside the windows at this end was a framework of steel. This must be a fire lookout, then, and a private one, since the government would never have made it so luxurious. There would be a platform on top of the tower, with telescope, maps, telephone, and a two-way radio.

Scott could see carefully made paths in various parts of the ridge. By turning he could look down on the lodge, towards which a great pool of golden sunlight was now advancing. Intense light added to the hypnosis of failure and exhaustion.

The amateurs had proved to be like the last runner of a cross-country race, merely funny. He had ended in the hands of Damon in the private preserve of Penfield, and it was clear that he would not get out of here. He could not be allowed to get out. When such men were forced outside the law, they had to make sure. Damon's safety had always been that someone else committed the illegalities. Now he had been forced into a monumental one—and as for Penfield, he had simply gone berserk. . . . And had got away with it.

As bad as losing the game which he had played as well as he knew how was the knowledge that his best had been silly and feeble. . . . Irv would try to make it hot for them, and as always Irv would have

only rumour, guesswork, and no facts. No teeth, no grip, nothing to go on. Well, some day a reflective mind might note the frequency with which people disappeared in these parts. Too bad not to have contrived to damage Damon a little last night. Too bad never to know what had happened to that wrecked ear of Penfield's. Not to know what had happened to Marta, not to know anything about Marta. With the thought of Marta his mind numbed and fell away into despair.

In the cove below, a thread of blue smoke rose from a chimney, straight up through shadow. At Silvertip the day was beginning. His indifferent gaze came back to the north ledge. And something over a quarter of a mile away, this side of the road, someone was moving along one of the neat little trails—for he had seen a human figure cross between two trees. Were they getting on the job so early? No, for though that path might lead down to the lodge, it certainly did not come up from it. It appeared, rather, to circle the head of the cove, along the hillside. It slanted along the ridge down this side and, at about where Berg sat on the steps, dipped towards the gulf.

Scott watched it with agonized concentration. Yes! Another opening in the big pines and the figure hurried across it. He was moving slowly where the trees hid him from any possible observation and running across the gaps. Fifty yards farther on there was a big gap and the path curved and ran along the edge.

Scott's heart began to drag and pound—for it was not a man, it was a woman. She came to that projecting edge and stood behind a tree, peering round it . . . It was . . . but it couldn't possibly be . . . but it was! No one could mistake that tall figure, and there was the red feather on the Bemidji hat, and the dark green skirt. It was Marta. She was here . . . looking down at Silvertip.

If she kept to that path she would pass within a few yards of Berg on the steps . . . Was he still on the steps?

Scott crawled along the window-seat to the south windows and noiselessly peered out. Berg sat there, completely immobile, staring at the gulf of sunlight.

Scott lowered himself to the floor and crept towards the door, moving the chair before him inch by inch, to an angle where the opening door would partly conceal him. The labouring of his heart half-choked him and he waited in an agony of indecision. Now! No! Wait—wait a little longer—wait longer still!

"Berg!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Damon! Berg! Berg!"

He kept on yelling, and the door swung inwards and, on his knees, he hurled the chair at Berg, who fell over it heavily. Scott toppled on him, swinging his fists, using his knees. He managed to yell, "Marta, run like hell!" He rocked and shook as the powerful little thug struggled, rising inch by inch against Scott's weight and fists. There was no leverage in his leg, he slugged and slugged, a blow in his stomach sickened him . . . and suddenly there was no fighting, no one to hit.

For Berg, half crouching, was standing altogether still, with his arms out, and, crazily seen, Marta was holding a gun in the small of his back. Scott lunged and tackled him round the knees and brought him down. He lay flat and Marta knelt beside him, poking the gun into his face.

She handed it to Scott and ran out of the room. She had got away! But she was back again, bringing a tin box. She produced rolls of bandage, stripped the blue paper from several. "Tie his wrists. Behind him—not in front." Electrified, Scott did just that, giving himself the enormous consolation of hitting the thug full in the face when he struggled again. Marta brought a towel from the other room. "Fold it and tie it over his mouth." He did so and she unwrapped more bandages and said, "His ankles, too, and then bind the knots. . . ." That did it and there was a gun in his pocket, the one he had fired at Scott last night. Scott got it and turned towards Marta.

She said, tensely, "You're hurt! How badly? We've got to get out of here at once." He said, "Sprained ankle—I can't stand on it." She knelt beside him, untied his handkerchief, was wrapping a wide bandage round it tightly. Her hands were deft but terribly urgent and her face was desperate. "You'll be able to climb a little—you'll have to. It's about a quarter of a mile. . . . Put on your shoe. Can you stand up?"

He could, and she went out again, coming back with several small cans and boxes. "I know a good place. We'll take him, too. Untie his feet."

"Is there a radio in the tower?" Scott asked.

"No. Only a telephonic to the lodge. . . . Don't worry—I've thought it all out. . . . Make him get up and you can lean on him."

Scott flourished Berg's own gun before the eyes that gleamed hotly above the gag. "Follow the lady," he said. "And just try something funny, anything at all."

He put his left hand under Berg's rigid, bound arm. He could walk—he could walk miles. For delight had spread through him, a powerful intoxicant, the strongest stimulant he had ever felt. . . . Marta led them down the path a hundred yards, turned off and climbed, came out on the ridge again, and then plunged between trees. Presently they emerged on a small promontory, at the top of a sheer cliff. It was a shallow saucer, filled with grass, walled round with trees. You could see the lodge below and the fire-tower above and to the left. But this place could be seen only from a plane.

"Tie him to a tree?" Marta said.

"No. Tie his feet again and roll him over on his face."

Beyond the rear edge of the little depression there was a big clump of juniper, and they ended by rolling Berg into it, against the roots. Scott turned towards her, blazing, "This is first-rate. Now, get started! That must be the road to Sacramento, back there where the ridge breaks. Nobody will be awake for at least an hour. You can

make it—I'm damned sure you can! Is there a gate-keeper or anything of the sort?"

Her white, tense, desperate face crumpled. She said, "I heard shouting. I knew your voice," and began to sob. He tried to stand up, but she sat beside him, laid her head on his shoulder, and gave herself up to tears. "I was never meant to do these things! Why do I keep having to? Why do I have to have more nerve and strength than I've got? . . . It's always going to be the last time and then it never is. I can't—and I keep having to. . . . Isn't there any end to it?"

He held her till her sobs stopped. She whispered, "Scott! It is you, it really is! I thought I'd never see you again." Her face turned from his shoulder and her lips rose to his.

When they were again aware of sunlight and the world his watch showed ten minutes past seven. "Get started now, Marta," he said, unhappily, but she shook her head. "It's too late—we'll have to spend the morning here . . . And besides—I'm hungry. We're always having breakfast together." Tears came to her eyes again. "I got stuff at the fire-tower." She opened her boxes. Disdainfully, "Soda crackers—sweet chocolate—sardines—beans. Who packs these things? I'd give anything for coffee. . . . I've never taken a prisoner before. Do we feed him?"

"If he's still with me tomorrow I'll give him a drink of water. Is there water?"

"There's a spring back in the trees. It's a good idea—I'll wash my face."

Her cheeks were pinker when she came back and she was—well, buoyant, exhilarated. They both were, they were half-drunk with—well, with what? It was certainly not hope, for, however isolated they were here in sun and emptiness, they were still walled round by danger which had been suspended merely, not withdrawn. They were buoyed up by the consciousness of being together again—and, for the moment, it was enough.

They ate hungrily and told their separate stories of the last thirty-six hours. Incredible, staggering stories, which had no momentousness at all for this curious hour, in a world of gold and green and blue, an island above space and apart from time.

As scrupulous as a girl scout, Marta gathered up the paper, flattened the cans, put them in a crevice, and covered them with dirt. It was absurd and completely in character. "This is our eighth breakfast together," she said. "If I couldn't remember each one separately, I'd believe it was a thousand. . . . When I was Marie Royce the Red Cross taught me first aid. I bandage beautifully. Should I bandage more of you?"

He shook his head. No ribs broken; he was stiff and sore; there were patches of dried blood on his forehead and cheeks. But nothing of importance. She showed him wrists chafed by knots, forearms and cheeks bruised a little and scratched by underbrush. She took

off her stockings—"I've ripped stockings to shreds all the way across the continent"—and her legs were much more badly scratched. She reported bruised shoulders and there were unpleasant marks on her throat. But both of them had come through so far comparatively whole.

"No one ever called me an athlete," Scott said, "but I don't think that any Dartmouth boy could throw a better chair."

"I have no lipstick, no powder, not even a comb. Candidly, Scott, any of them would improve you, too. You were such a well-dressed idler at Petit Marais. You simply aren't now. If you can make the spring, I suggest that you try washing."

He could make it, slowly and painfully, but fairly easily. He drank deep and washed as well as he could, but nothing could improve his stained and torn clothes. He found a dead branch and was able to break off part of it for a cane.

Marta was lying on her side, her head on her rolled-up jacket. She opened her eyes to smile sleepily at him, then closed them. Her superb recuperative power, her ability to put everything but the immediate moment away, to relax, dismiss, and await. It had struck him that first morning in the Wisconsin woods, had been the first quality of hers that had compelled his admiration. Since then he had found others.

He wished he had a blanket to spread over her. . . . He lay on one hip, looking at her. How often had he watched her sleeping? The shoes on her unstockinged feet had been sturdy at Bernidji: they were gashed and worthless now, the toe-cap of one ripped away, the sole of the other gaping. The tan blouse was dirt-stained and copiously torn. There were rips in the dark green skirt. A scratch that had reddened and swollen ran in a long, looping scrawl from knee to instep down her right leg.

He studied the calm of her face, he watched the rise and fall of her breast, and his own eyes closed. He woke when the line of advancing sun crossed his face. It was 9.40 and the brief sleep had enormously restored him. Marta was still sleeping, and this poignant pause in time still endured. He had the most intense awareness of being alone with her not only in the Sierra but in an empty universe. He got to his feet. The movement woke Marta. She smiled at him, drugged with sleep, her cheeks flushed and soft.

He said, unsteadily, "Your loveliest moment is the moment when you wake."

"That's an extremely personal remark; it's—well, it's intimate but I don't think it's chaste. I should think that a man who was able to make it would be able to do something about it."

She sat up, holding out her arms. . . . "That's quite enough to do at the moment," she said breathlessly. "It's—considerably more than . . . adequate."

They stretched prone in the grass at the rim of the saucer, side by side, their shoulders touching. Both knew that the necessities must be

resumed and this high loneliness must end in some still undetermined desperation. But not yet. They held to sunlight and blue space, wind in the pines like the sound of distant applause, the small movement of birds, the touch of shoulders. Fifty yards away was a gagged and bound murderer and below them was Silvertip. And, for a moment still, the hell with them.

But, "I haven't seen it for nearly three years," Marta said. "I've only this minute remembered it's my home." Her hand fumbled for his. "Scott! What terrible things we've come through!" He put an arm over her shoulders and turned her face towards him. She kissed him, but moved away. "Maybe we should both remember that I'm married to someone else—still." Her face sobered, then she was laughing. "All the way across the continent that fact has produced the most violent decorum in both of us—alternately."

There was an occasional movement in the clearing at the lodge below them, a car arriving, someone moving from house to house, someone riding away leading a horse. Marta said, gazing at it, "I keep remembering that the place is simply filled with marvellous showers and bath-tubs. . . . Taylor Damon is there and Gene must be too. It's amazing how you do what you set out to do, Scott. I took you for an incompetent at sight. But you started out to bring me to Silvertip and you've brought me here, across a lot of hard going, in spite of both Damon and Gene and in spite of me."

"Can you shoot that automatic you brandish so blithely, Marta?"

"I married a great sportsman, after all. Of course I can."

"We've got two guns now. Theoretically, I suppose, we're formidable."

"They're a good deal better defence against Gene Penfield than the high-minded idealism you innocently started with."

"If he is alive and did get to the house, then the whole Sierra is being combed for you this minute. We'll have to stay here till evening. Then you'll have to get away in the darkness. You have a talent for it. And—carry the gun cocked."

There was something odd about her lips. "Over the mountains to the West? Then where, Scott? Where should I go? What should I do? What do you foresee for me?"

He shrugged. "You don't lack expedients. Just vanish into the anonymity I dragged you out of."

"What will you do?"

"They might blunder in here looking for you or for our gangster—I'd better stay till you start out. When you've gone—well, after getting this close to Silvertip I certainly intend to go down and look it over."

That wasn't oddness at her lips—it was tenderness. She laughed. "Are you sure that you aren't simply working out something that requires you to spend the day with me?"

He nodded. "I certainly haven't left that out of account." Bitterness roughed his voice. "If I hadn't bungled everything, I might be

taking you to dinner tonight. Or—or, starting to drive you another thousand miles and be damned to everyone."

"I know." Her gaze sought the lodge again. "That's still my house. I wonder what he did with all my clothes . . . I keep feeling the strongest desire to array myself for you. I was supposed to look smart—the woman they took pictures of. And you've intimated that you like to look at me. It's insane, but I lie here and long to go through the whole ritual—hairstresser, and hot bath to flush my cheeks, and perfume, and simply lacquer myself with cosmetics. And clothes that would distract you—that would simply storm you and convince you. And then say, 'Am I comely, Scott, am I delightful in your eyes?'" Pinkness swept over her cheeks and deepened and spread to her throat. "That's shameful exhibitionism. It's schoolgirlish. The plain truth is it's . . . nuptial."

She turned on her hip to gaze at him and said decisively, "It's a pretty day-dream and we never had a chance at it. . . . I've tried hard to think what the best way is to finish things. But you meant what you said, didn't you? You're willing for me to try slipping away—you even want me to."

He said slowly, "When I knew that you were with Penfield . . . when I was licked and crippled and locked up and waiting to die—well, my dear, a man thinks hard. Nothing is worth another nightmare. Get away, Marta. This time, if you like, it need only be temporary. We'll find some way of stopping Penfield—of stopping his threat to you, at least."

She sat up, cross-legged, and was equally grave. "Very pretty. But, as you point out, being hopelessly trapped makes one think. That was a long day on the train and no night was ever as long as last night. . . . Meanwhile, what about the job you started out to do? You don't know what the mysterious Mr. Barney is doing, but you hope he's doing a lot."

Scott waved inclusively at the Sierra. "He's doing something. And there is the Sloane girl, who started West to get your Jap. That's why I say it need be only temporary this time. You can reappear and pick up your life anywhere."

"Just possibly. And meanwhile we don't know what's happening down there." She nodded at the lodge. "Mr. Barney and Dr. Miura might do a lot and still be too late. Or they might be able to do nothing at all. We might come close and still fail, or still be too late."

"Everything has been one step behind or just too late."

She smoothed her ragged skirt over her knees. "You're an extraordinary person, Scott. Nobody has been able to stop you from doing what you planned to do. And what you planned to do was exactly right. You were going to produce Gene's dead wife, create an uproar, and spoil his candidacy—make him no use to anyone. It was the right idea, it was the only idea that could possibly succeed. We've seen it working—it brought out Gene and his master both, desperate, willing to go any length to stop it. Mr. Barney and Dr. Miura may be

very useful and they may not—but we can be sure of the original idea.”

His throat contracted with his angry “No!” but Marta said, quietly, “Yes. I knew at that wrecked car that there wasn’t any choice. I started in the other direction and found it sealed shut. When I heard you yelling, I was on my way to the lodge. That trail leads right down to it. I’ve loved this morning—and I’m going on down.”

She stood up. Scott scrambled awkwardly to his feet and seized her arm. “Don’t be a fool! You’ve had the most stupendous luck. You won’t get it again.”

She didn’t wrench away—merely shook her head. “There’s that gift of yours for being right. All it ever needed was for me to appear. So I’m appearing.”

“The moment either of them sees you——”

“Even that would stop them both for good, wouldn’t it? Certainly he meant to kill me last night. Certainly neither of them has the slightest scruple. But you can’t go on hiding murders for ever, and there are a lot of people around Silvertip. I think they can’t touch me, Scott. I think I’m safe and they’re stopped, the moment I show up. But, even if they should . . . you spent a week, telling me I don’t matter in the least. You made a convert.”

She brought Scott out of lovesickness into realism again. There was still Damon, there was still a deadly and so far successful conspiracy. And the goal he had started towards a long time ago could still be won, after repeated defeats, with time closing in.

“I’m as much a liability to them as you are. We’ll both go.”

“No, it’s well over a mile by that path. I doubt if you’ll be able to walk it before tomorrow at the earliest. Even if you could, you’d still have to stay here. To make sure. You’ve got a man who committed murder for them—he isn’t as valuable as I am, but he’ll be useful. You simply stay here and think well of me. If you’re not with me by tomorrow night, you’ll stick that gun pointedly in his ribs and take him down the automobile road, and find the sheriff of Placer County, and start back with a million deputies to see what became of me.”

“You may never reach the house.”

“I intended to go in through the servants’ wing before anyone was awake, and wait for the likeliest moment. I can’t do that now. . . . Look, Scott, I haven’t got any heroics, I’m not stuffed with courage and patriotic virtues. I don’t do these things easily or even gracefully. I wasn’t meant for them—I’m soft and at the moment I’m as scared as I’ve been any time this week. It would be easier to stay here and persuade you to make love to me. It just happens that a job came my way.”

The shine of tears showed at the corners of her eyes again. “Perhaps you understand that I like lying in the sun with you. And over there”—she nodded towards the West—“I’ve got an aunt and a sister—I could like trying to make up for some of the grief I’ve cost them.”

She moved nearer and locked her arms behind his head and was whispering, "I could persuade you. And—how did you put it?—drive me a thousand miles and be damned to everyone. You have agreeable ideas, my dear. Kiss me."

Their hands clung, when they stood apart. "Good luck," he said.

"Luck—or something else. Don't think about me too much. After all, we have even got a chance."

She walked away, stood at the rear edge of the saucer and smiled at him, waved, turned away. He watched her till the trees shut her off. Tall, lithe, beautiful, ragged, and forthright. It would take her perhaps twenty-five minutes to get down that trail.

Leaning on his branch of dead wood, Scott limped over to the clump of juniper. The evil little man rolled and writhed at sight of him, straining against the bandages and grunting behind the gag. One last trump. But there were no trumps now, for anyone, there was only time. He pushed Berg still farther under the dwarf evergreen, and tore off sprays of it to cover him more thoroughly. He tried to restore the trampled grass. He stood back a few yards. Unless you knew where to look, you could pass here and see nothing suspicious.

"If I don't get back this way, Berg," he called, "you'll like our autumn weather when it comes."

Well over a mile down. They might grab her at any foot of it. They might grab him. He took Berg's gun in his right hand, used his cane with his left hand, and limped out to follow Marta.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TAYLOR DAMON TOOK A QUIET SATISFACTION IN RESTORING THE EFFECTIVENESS of an organization which responded to his hand. The danger of the attack which he had turned back was that it had got him out of touch, and the machine, when left to run itself, spun crazily and wasted energy. This morning it ran smoothly, though the fact that there was only a single telephone wire out of Silvertip was a typical Penfield carelessness. That wire had been overburdened with directions from this end. But it was now beginning to bring in telegrams of congratulation, in which the element of relief was easily discernible. In various parts of the United States acutely interested people were feeling invigorated by the signs that the interrupted arrangements had been resumed without loss.

A man had been sent to Sacramento to make arrangements for the Senator's Press conference at 5 p.m. The Senator would drive down at his leisure after lunch, accompanied only by Barry Corse. Corse's newspaper chain was the public father of Penfield's candidacy—had been plugging him for President for over four years, ever since Damon

had decided that the people's hero would make the best standard-bearer for the people. Corse expected to grow larger in the light reflected from Penfield—and doubtless could be allowed to grow larger.

Damon had drilled the tense and excited Penfield in sentiments proper to voice to the Press. Corse believed that so much care was unnecessary. "It doesn't matter what he says, so long as he's dignified, vague, and noble. He can't possibly be anything else, if he's left to himself." Corse gazed down the long room at Penfield—flushed and fidgety, flowing rapidly from attitude to attitude—and admired him as a work of art. "The mind may be rudimentary, Taylor, but what a magnificent male he is! That's the most beautiful head in American politics since Bryan was a young man. He is as beautiful as Apollo, and yet that beauty is splendidly marred by a trace of Abe Lincoln, which gives an earthy touch and suggests the greatness of the American past. Men will respond to Lincoln and women will adore Apollo. And no one of any sex can hold out against the boyish smile that is clearly nine-tenths heart-break. He will raise Presidential charm to an all-time high."

Corse was not the whimpering, defeated man of two o'clock this morning. He had got his nerve back, and, with it, the dynamic intelligence that had created one of the most formidable instruments of publicity in the United States. Corse was stimulated, and the truth was that all of them, these dozen-odd principals and assistants, had tasted triumph after a bad scare. Silvertip vibrated with renewed energies, with self-congratulation, with the heady knowledge that the great game was safely under way at last.

Nevertheless, Damon, intent on the unfolding job, his mind smoothly moving ahead towards further jobs, aware that the start of the game meant only that it must be played with an expertness which could never lapse now without producing disaster—Damon continued to wonder about the beautiful figurehead. Gene Penfield had by no means lost his excitement of last night. He fairly strutted as his companions began to call him 'Senator' and the realization of the change grew on him, but a strong tension still underlay his swagger. The hero's cheeks had a high colour, there was an odd flickering in his eyes, his voice sometimes lost its resonance and grew shrill, he talked too much and too fast, and sometimes he fell abruptly silent. He could not keep still and sometimes was not at hand when he was wanted. He ranged over the big house and the grounds. He was seen consulting with servants in undertones. He wandered from room to room, cast himself into chairs which he leaped out of a moment later, stood at windows gazing off down the valley.

Meeting him in an upstairs hall, Damon said, "Get over the fidgets before the Press sees you, Gene. The Press likes its candidates reasonably virginal but not downright girlish. You're no débutante at public life. If the thought of the United States Senate frightens you, try to call up the big-game hunter's nerve we've read about, try

to produce the aviator's glacial calm your interviewers always mention. Or is there something on your mind?"

"Nothing's on my mind!" Penfield said with wholly unjustified passion. "Will you stop bottle-feeding me, Taylor? All the decent instincts of a man who owes you a great deal prompt me to take a great deal from you. But it certainly must be obvious to you that from now on it's a willing partnership or none at all. You are a valuable adviser and a privileged friend, but I'm in the driver's seat and both of us had better face that fact squarely. Keep your damned tongue off me!"

"I recommend a sedative," Damon said aloofly. "Also a number of second thoughts. Try to infuse some intelligence in the second thoughts."

Something in those angry eyes suggested more than egotism; there was still a vestige of last night's anxiety, even fear. You had to acknowledge that there was a manic-depressive streak in Gene Penfield. It was part of the successful formula, for it produced his enormous excitement and dedication—and without them Penfield could not possibly have brought vast audiences to hypnotic agreement with the nonsense he had been taught to spout. It was part of the formula but it would have to be watched.

You had to work with imperfect instruments. Men should be bred without flaws, but till they were Damon would have to allow for idiocy and manic streaks, for frailties and concealed weaknesses and illogical behaviour. First you would have to breed logic into the human race.

Others besides Damon became aware of the figurehead's turbulence. It was a jubilant lunch in the dining-room, which was not as large as the big lounge but was vulgarly large nevertheless. It was a millionaire's room, Damon thought contemptuously, hung with the heads of large animals which rich adolescents liked to shoot, and it was a millionaire's meal, with pheasants from Silvertip done in aspic, and champagne from a Penfield winery in Napa Valley. Damon lunched on bread and green salad, content to let the illogical organisms express their triumph with heavy food, wine, and noise. A dozen men who had been at an extremity of despair last night, who were at an equally emotionally extremity of triumph now. They must be permitted their jubilation. They must be allowed to get drunk on a mixture of power and alcohol. They must be granted their noise and boastfulness and posturing.

Someone was always addressing Penfield as 'Senator' and he kept replying with fragments of orations, lines out of an orator's make-up box. This momentous day—the beginning of the end of anarchy in America—invincible uprush of the public will—rouse a sense of our national greatness—give a people discipline and order—solidarity of the white race, truth, enlightenment, correction of all but fatal errors, and so on. Noise increased, the others competed with Penfield in imbecility, and sang and shook hands with one another. Suddenly

Penfield stood up and held a champagne glass towards Damon, saying in a voice grown shrill again, "Drink to the chief!" The dozen of them roared to their feet and raised their glasses, drank, applauded, and, Damon thought, would be delighted to sing whatever was a rich man's equivalent of 'He's a jolly good fellow'.

"You people have had enough to drink," Damon said. "This is neither a fraternity banquet nor a meeting of the Rotary Club. If you will sober up, we'll get on with the job."

"Do you ever do anything for pleasure, Taylor?" Barry Corse asked jovially. "Don't you ever relax the ascetic attitude? Tobacco, liquor, women, sports, folly—no one ever caught you enjoying yourself. What do you do to feel like a man?"

But Frank Sumter, the ex-Congressman, was concerned. "Gene had certainly better stop drinking," he said, strolling up to Damon. "It's doing him no damn' good, and there's that Press conference. What's the matter with him? He's nervous as a cat. He's pretty damn' close to an explosion. Look here, Taylor, could he have got a concussion in that accident?"

Barry Corse laughed. "Been years since you felt any emotion about public office except how to hang on to it, Frank. Don't forget there's stage fright. The young soprano waiting in the wings, the speed-ball up from the bush leagues going into the box for the Yankees. The United States Senate doesn't impress you but it makes Gene delirious. He's a bride with the world shut away and bed-time coming on."

"I never yet saw a man run away from being sworn in," Sumter said. "I don't like it, what's more. Walk up behind him and touch his shoulder and he'd either yell or take a swing at you. I'd say he was scared if there was anything to be scared of."

Damon inwardly checked this confirmation of what he had perceived. . . . If it came to that, what would be left to do? It would be a moment of catastrophe. No, not of catastrophe, merely of setback. The mind that saw circumstance in a white light and did what circumstance required, the cold mind, would merely have to do what it would have had to do at any other time. You would cut Penfield away precisely as you would cut a fallen mast away. Drop him without emotion and without loss of time, take the setback for granted, and go on. Face the necessity and act on it, without wasting energy in panic or regret.

Across the room Penfield laughed. It was a high, prolonged sound, quivering with hysterics. He slapped his thigh several times. He was standing straight and his face was beaming. Yet there was an odd illusion that he was crouching.

"Yeah," Frank Sumter said. "Any insanity in his family? Any chance that this timorous bride, this speedball in the big leagues, will blow his top?"

"He hasn't got mind enough to lose," Damon said. "Don't let your imagination trip you up. He's Senator Penfield, and we go on from here."

So at that moment it happened.

A house-man came in and, almost running, made for Penfield. At sight of him Damon stiffened, for the servant's face was grey with fear. Without deference, he pulled Penfield into a corner and whispered, his hands gyrating. Into Penfield's face came a look that was between frenzy and despair. He ran out of the room—into the gun-room. The door banged shut.

Everybody in the dining-room turned towards Damon. The luminous and glacial mind of Taylor Damon made no claim to intuition or clairvoyance. It knew that intuition and clairvoyance were merely superstitions which inferior minds clung to out of fear. But in the twentieth part of a second, that luminous and glacial mind snapped all the circuits shut, arrived at all the explanations, brought everything into order. This was the moment of catastrophe.

He took one step towards his lieutenants, who were frozen immobile, and said with the objectivity of a laboratory scientist, "Yes, gentlemen. He lied to me, when he should have had the intelligence to tell the truth. He tried to do something by himself and he failed at it. Both were fatal. He will not go to the Senate. Get Governor Custer on the 'phone."

She came in through one of the french windows that opened on the veranda. For a second or two his eyes presented her to him as a maid. She was wearing a maid's uniform. But she was not a maid.

Barry Corse's voice, shriller than Penfield's had ever been, filled the room with a shriek, "Oh, my God!"

"Precisely," Damon said. "This is Mrs. Penfield. That's what he was hiding from us."

She took hold of the back of a chair but could not stand, and slumped into it. She could barely speak. "Where's my husband? Before I faint—he killed Dixon Gale. He flew a German agent out of the country to save him from the F.B.I. Now you know."

There was the sound of frantically running feet upstairs. And someone shouting.

* * * * *

Part of Scott's mind insisted on humming "There's one more river to cross", and he couldn't shut it up. But what had to be crossed was the final two or three hundred yards of brilliant sun. He had got down most of the trail without too much difficulty. The bandage held his ankle firm and his nerves were so keyed up that he felt little pain except when a stone slid underfoot or he tried to go too fast. That eccentric segment of his mind, which was about all of his mind that seemed able to function, kept assuring him that somebody was going to leap out of the underbrush at him, like Berg last night. So he kept peering at trees and coming up to turns in the trail with Berg's gun pointed at them—whereupon that segment of his mind jeered and made sour remarks about playing cops and robbers. But before he got to the bottom the ankle began to collect its tax, whereupon the active segment

of his mind advised him to put the gun in his pocket and concentrate on walking. The ankle had become a big, inert sponge without sensation but the calf and thigh were a highly interesting kind of fire. He had to stop and let it burn while he leaned against a tree or sprawled across a boulder. Sweat poured off his forehead, which made his sight intermittent, and he didn't breathe any longer, he merely panted. It began to appear that even the eccentric segment of his mind was going to fold up.

The trail came out behind an unidentifiable building and still he had seen no one, no disturbance had occurred, and nobody had jumped out at him. There was a bench here and he sank down on it. His shirt was drenched with sweat, and though his leg most certainly was not paralysed it had ceased to be of any practical use. About two hundred yards of bright emptiness stretched between this place and the polished log veranda that ran the whole length of the lodge, with steps leading up to it at both ends. At an angle, about the same distance from the veranda but farther from this bench, there was a clump of giant pines, and several motor-cars were parked in their shade.

Everything was sunny, motionless, and completely silent—the great valley opening out ahead, the ridge to the westward with the road crossing the saddle, this symmetrical park as attractive as possible. 'Very pretty,' that segment of his mind remarked pertly, 'and so let's get going.' A man in work-clothes came to a window of the unidentified building, and peered at Scott. Probably he ought to do something about that, but the man's gaze was without curiosity and he went away.

'You've got to get there, boy scout,' his mind said. He stood up and the leg accepted his weight but made a distinct protest about going any farther. He took a step. Made it! Add a lot of steps together and they might equal two hundred yards. Off to the left of the motor-cars a man lifted a hand to him in greeting. Look at those hair pants—a cowboy! Scott waved back. 'Friend of the house,' his mind said in a stage whisper—'you walk up to the joint and instead of ganging up on you they just say, "Howdy, stranger, light and eat." Just like Hitchcock.'

He was more than half-way across that sunny stretch when the lodge erupted. Someone yelled. A lot of other people began to yell. A lot of people were scared. And the noise acted like a trigger on Scott Warner. He was running! It wasn't much of a run but he was putting one foot in front of the other, he was getting there, and his mind ceased to be just a segment and cleared miraculously. His course took him towards one end of the long veranda. The yelling inside the lodge continued. Somebody ran out one door and in another. A shot silenced every other sound. Scott pounded on. Before he reached the veranda a man slid and jolted down it, running towards him. Running as hard as his portliness would permit. It was Walton Hancock, the Chicago banker, well known to the author of *Fascist America*, and his face was almost comically scared.

Scott shouted at him, "Where's Marta Penfield?" Without pause,

without recognition, Walton Hancock jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the lodge and picked up speed.

Scott reached the steps, but as he got to the top of them his leg gave out entirely and he fell forward on the floor. He lay still for a moment, gathering strength. In that moment, half-way down the veranda, Gene Penfield came through the wide door, turned, and stood threatening someone inside the house—with a gun. Penfield, but Penfield metamorphosed. Poised on the balls of his feet, one hand holding the automatic pistol at his hip, he looked something less than human.

His voice was high and broken. "Where's Marta? Where's Damon? I'll kill anyone who hides them."

On the veranda floor Scott caught his breath in a great gasp, for she was alive, and rolled on one hip and tugged at Berg's gun in his pocket. But a young man slipped through a window near him and ran towards the door. He had almost reached it when Penfield pivoted towards him, and he left his feet in a flying tackle that caught Penfield round the knees and brought him down. As though a barrier had gone down others poured through the big door and leaped to his assistance. Penfield's pistol skated thirty feet down the veranda, Penfield was heaving up to his knees and going down again, shook someone off, crumpled as someone else climbed on him. The man's strength was tremendous but somehow they got him subdued, if not quieted. He kept making sounds that were not words.

Everything was frozen in a tableau. Scott pulled himself erect, cradled the knee of his bad leg in a chair—and was completely disregarded, had not even been seen. Faces appeared at windows, pinched with fright. A servant stood in the big doorway, patting his hands gently and moaning. Frank Sumter came out and folded up in a chair, his face twitching. Barry Corse—the whole wrecking crew appeared to be here—came out, wobbling. Corse looked ninety years old. He was shrunk and collapsed in on himself, he was shaking worse than Sumter, and he found it expedient to sit on the floor, only half looking at the three younger men who now had Penfield's arms pinioned and were half-holding him on a rustic bench, half-lying on him.

Taylor Damon came through the door. Scott got the gun out but laid it on a table. No need of it. No one had seen him, no one would see him, no one had eyes for anyone or anything except Damon and Penfield. Like the others, Damon had changed for the worst.

For the man of pure thought, the man who fed on cresses and honey, the austere designer of disciplined societies, was not austere now and was not in a condition to design anything. He might be the American Lenin, but he was almost as scared as his subordinate conspirators.

"Wipe his face!" Damon said, in a kind of whisper. There was blood on Penfield's chin and he struggled when someone wiped it off with a handkerchief. Damon stood looking at him and trying to

resume his character. "I was wrong," he said. His voice was still shaken but the customary ice was beginning to form in it again. "You could never have stood up under it. You would always have wrecked us. I made that mistake. All the other mistakes come from that one."

The Honourable Frank Sumter groaned. "I told you he was crazy. What the devil can we do?"

"He is not crazy. He is an incompetent fool." Spent, but forcing himself to resume command, Damon leaned against a polished log pillar. "He is my cardinal mistake. He's the mistake of all of us. . . . He let himself be fooled when his wife disappeared. I learned that two weeks ago. But he was trying to think for himself. When he left here he was trying to find her. To kill her. He failed to. You heard her say that he killed Gale and had dealings with a foreign agent. She was probably telling the truth. She knew. That was why he tried to kill her."

The American Lenin closed his eyes for a moment, tired out. "I didn't know that, gentlemen. Nobody knew it. Still, we're better off now than if we had gone farther before finding it out. We have lost a Senator. We have lost a candidate. We have not lost the fight." He shot a glance at Penfield, and said in a tone brimful and running over with contempt, "You fool!"

The brutalized, contorted figure rippled again, and Penfield's strangled voice came from behind an arm that was trying to shut it off, "You're done for, Taylor. You won't live through it."

Damon appeared to be in imminent danger of feeling an emotion. At least, you would have been justified in saying that he snarled. "Your solution of every problem is a revolver. You never possibly decide to shoot the right people." He turned away from Penfield to the group of shaken, scared men. . . . And it struck Scott Warner with electrifying force that everything was over. A vast and heady intoxication began to spread through him, for here were at least half the key figures of a gang—of a gang who had thought they could rule the United States, who had seemed likely to make good. And they were just a handful of rattled people whose muscles were knotted with fear.

Damon's briskness was coming back. "You can imagine what will happen when word gets out that Mrs. Penfield is alive. That should have been prevented. I would have prevented it if this fool had not interfered. He interfered and I failed. I imagine that she is at the telephone right now—I should be, in her place. That will take care of Penfield. . . . I suppose we must arrange to keep him neutralized till we can get out of here——"

It had been a fascinating show, it had been the most absorbing show that Scott had ever attended, but it was time to ring down the curtain. He called, the length of the veranda, "But your *Gauleiter* is right, Damon—you're done for."

They faced towards him like a group of marionettes worked by a

single string. There was a still, clear moment while the face of Taylor Damon ceased to be the face of the American Lenin and broke up through incredulity into pure terror. Then he screamed, "Kill that man!"

He glanced wildly at the railing of the veranda, at the stairs behind him. He took several mincing steps, a kind of dance of terror here on the veranda, and then leaped towards the big door in the centre. But the door had Marta in it suddenly, and one hand hanging at her side was holding the pistol she had picked up last night. Damon screamed again—a childish scream—and shrank back from her. He was probably going to scream again. He didn't—he fell into a chair and began to crumble inwards from the edges.

"I told you he was afraid of getting hurt," Marta said. She tottered out to the nearest chair and sat down. "You should not have come, Scott. I'm glad you did. Welcome to Silvertip." Her shoulders sagged. She laid Gene Penfield's gun on a rustic table. "I am utterly sick of firearms," she said. "Please take charge."

Scott had picked up his own gun—Berg's gun—but no one was doing anything; he felt a sudden intense distaste for melodrama, and he put it down again. "Right," he said. "Nobody is going to shoot anybody. As the *Führer* said, the shooting should have been got through long before this and it's too late now. . . . Remember when we were afraid of these cut-rate personalities?"

He looked at the gaping, bewildered faces. At the intent trio who were holding Penfield down. At Marta, who was pale and altogether exhausted in her chair—but alive, untouched, safe. At Taylor Damon, who had disintegrated into a mere case of hysterics. And at the hero of the American counter-revolution, held down by his own gang of absurdities, his nose bleeding on someone's forearm and his face nothing to interest the rotogravures.

Over! This was the end of the road. Desperation, hopelessness, futility ended on this charming veranda, in stimulating Sierra air. The steel springs inside Scott Warner had lost their tension, and a throbbing leg merely emphasized the health of a sunny and airy soul.

"Must have got your conspiracy at the bargain basement, Damon—it came unglued." He smiled at Marta. "Shall we do this with dignity and fine manners?" Then he turned to the others. "I'll explain the *Führer's* collapse. You see, he had ordered me killed and didn't know it had gone sour. What's worse, that was his second miss—he came here with two strikes on him. He had tried to have Mrs. Penfield killed, and that misfired too. He's a spendthrift of murder, but he neglects to make good. . . . You ought to have attended to it yourself, Damon. But the sight of violence offends you, doesn't it?—you like it done off-stage while you plan society. Your nerves jangle easily. Remember ranking me just above the poets? Well, it's in my hands now."

Here Barry Corse got up from the floor. "What's all this talk of murder?" he demanded truculently. . . . Good! The brethren had

got hold of themselves a little and would do some talking. "Who are you? What do you mean by forcing your way into a private residence with a gun?"

Marta said, "You look a little soiled, Scott. Perhaps even a little disreputable."

"I'm an amateur Nemesis, Mr. Corse," Scott said courteously. "My name is Warner, and your papers are given to disliking me. What's more to the point, I'm a man who chanced to arrive here at the awkward moment when Mr. Penfield was shooting at people."

"Not at all," the newspaper baron said. "The sudden appearance of Mrs. Penfield had unnerved us all. It had not been in anyone's mind that she was alive. You can understand a general excitement——"

"That's your first try, then?" Scott asked sunnily. "But the shot which Mr. Penfield fired just before he came out on the porch? And Congressman Sumter's suggestion that Mr. Penfield must be crazy? And the *Führer's* command to kill me? I'm afraid it won't work, Mr. Corse—there are too many of us here, too many witnesses. What's still more awkward, up on the mountain I've got one of Mr. Damon's gangsters. He tried to kill me on Damon's orders, tried to kill Mrs. Penfield on Damon's orders, and did kill a man on his own initiative. . . . He's tied up near the cabin where you left me, Damon. Tied up and gagged—and very thoughtful. He's figuring how to save his hide by nailing yours to my barn door."

"I know nothing about all that," Barry Corse said. And the Honourable Frank Sumter, still breathing noisily, still white and shaky, said, "Mr. Damon arrived here during the night, Mr. Penfield a little later. Mr. Corse came yesterday and I've been here for several days. Whatever may have happened elsewhere——"

Scott broke in. "You see, Damon? The rats are getting off. . . . Frankly, gentlemen, for all I can see you may be able to get away with it. Mrs. Penfield and I have been exclusively engaged with your bosses. However, if you have no guilty knowledge, unquestionably you'll be glad to help us keep things in hand till we can get representatives of the law to Silvertip. The *Führer* will have to be guarded, and it looks as if the *Gauleiter* will have to be tied up. Mrs. Penfield and I are becoming experts at knots. You'll be happy to assist the orderly process of the law. You'll help detain a man known to have shot at someone and a man accused of attempted murder—outside your knowledge, of course——"

Taylor Damon stood up. "It was unforeseeable," he said. "It could not be calculated. Penfield was irrational." A ravaged man, he started to walk towards the far end of the veranda, and a kind of ataxia made his limbs jerk.

"Damon!" Scott shouted. "Come back here!"

But, standing up swiftly, Marta said, "Scott, no! Do you remember how you felt last night?" She raised her voice. "Those cars out by the trees, Mr. Damon."

Marta had experienced a sudden pity—but it was expediency that

came swiftly to Scott's mind. It would be to everyone's advantage if the final scene occurred somewhere away from Silvertip. Where, in fact, could Damon go? The American Lenin had been destroyed in less than five minutes, and it did not matter where the ultimate policeman might overtake him. . . . Everyone—Marta and Scott, dazed conspirators, servants—everyone watched the slow, robot-like motion of that figure. It went down the steps, came into the blinding sunlight of the flat. It moved like a figure held in a spell, and you watched it in a trance.

So they missed the moment. One of the anonymous young men who had been holding Penfield was on the floor, another reeled backwards over the bench, and Penfield was plunging down the length of the veranda. In that split second Scott shouted, "Shoot him!" and Marta flung out her hands and cried, "I can't."

"I can," Scott roared, and picked up his gun. But Penfield had scooped up the one that Marta had relinquished, had seized Marta, was forcing her with him down the veranda. There was shouting and an eddy of movement but no one followed him. But Scott was running. He ran the length of the veranda, ran down the stairs, ran five or ten steps into the flat, and came plunging to the ground for good. He got up on one elbow and it was as if a gigantic lens brought the whole sun-swept stretch into a crazy close-up, with movement retarded as in a nightmare. Penfield was carrying her now, running and staggering. Scott raised his gun, lowered it, raised it. Penfield dropped her, and Scott could see her get to her knees and fall forward again. Penfield had veered out at an angle and his arm went up. He shot. . . . He had shot Damon.

He was running again. Scott fired his gun, fired it again, then again. Penfield kept on running—then stopped short. Down at the far end of the flat two motor-cars stopped in a small eddy of dust and figures got out of them and ran towards Penfield in a spaced line. There was shouting. Penfield's arm came up again. The gun bucked as he shot, five times. They were shooting at him. He was down on one knee. He was down.

Scott got to his knees and tried to crawl forward. Somebody ran up and began to pound him on the shoulder. It was—it was Irv Barney! "You all right, son?" Irv was demanding vehemently. "You all right? Anybody hurt you?"

"Is Marta all right?"

Her voice reached him weakly. "If I manage to get over to you, may I please faint at last?"

Irv roared, "You faint before you show me where's the telephone and I won't print your picture in the paper."

* * * * *

Irv got to the telephone at sunset, authorized by sheriff and county attorney to 'phone his story to the *Globe*. It was a lot of story: that the hero of the American people had been killed by officers who were

trying to arrest him for murder, after he had slightly wounded a deputy and seriously wounded Taylor Damon, his partner in a conspiracy against the peace and security of the United States. That Marta Penfield was not dead but had appeared at Silvertip, that both Penfield and Damon had made attempts on her life. And all this, Irv prayerfully remarked, was merely the lead.

"Goes to show how far you can get in the newspaper business if you keep your face washed and your nose blown," he told Charlie Pond. For Charlie, following the scent, had driven up and they had let him in but not out. He would be allowed to 'phone the story to the *Sacramento Post*, which would help the *Globe* beat the world by sixteen hours. The sheriff had closed the roads to Silvertip till nine tomorrow morning, when hastily assembling battalions of newspapermen who did not wash their faces and blow their noses would be allowed in to pillory Marta and Scott.

But Scott would remember the afternoon as chaos flowing through swiftly changing images. Ann Sloane arriving with her Japanese. The county prosecutor arriving. Sheriff's cars arriving and departing. Two ambulances departing. Innumerable interviews broken up and resumed. Scott telling his story through a barrage of questions. Marta steel and ice while she told hers, then sobbing at the telephone while she talked to her aunt in Sacramento. Deputies bringing Berg down from the mountain. Dr. Miura making precise statements to the prosecutor's stenographer, to be fitted into the jigsaw. Departure of several official motor-cars bearing the principals and accessories of Taylor Damon's machine—who would be held as material witnesses in a town called Auburn, where Eastern lawyers would swiftly converge, bearing buckets of whitewash. A great rush and pressure, a great hurrying about—till at last it began to diminish, and when Irv came up at sunset a species of quiet had been achieved.

They had finally taken Scott to one of several guest-houses on the edge of the pines, where a small mountain creek tumbled among boulders. A dazed servant helped him bathe and found clothes for him, he didn't know or care whose. He lay in a porch-swing above the noisy creek and, when Irv came up, the physician at Auburn had at last got round to looking at his ankle. He strapped it, gave directions for treatment and promised to send crutches by deputy sheriff in the morning.

"You can either use them for several days or stay off it altogether. You'll need a cane for some time, anyway. The original sprain couldn't have been bad, but you've certainly raised hell with it since. . . . It will probably bother you tonight. I'll leave a sedative."

"Mr. Warner carries his own sedatives," Marta said, from the railing where she sat above the creek, watching them. "If you'll roll up your sleeve, Scott, I'll administer one."

Irv and Ann Sloane glanced at her quickly, with sudden hope. Scott saw the line of her lips soften. She almost laughed, then she did laugh—and all four of them were laughing together. She had

made the turn! Horror was over, and as they realized that, they laughed more, and it was a bewildered doctor who said good-bye.

She was tranquil, smiling at them from the railing, and Scott understood that the familiar but always amazing miracle had occurred. Marta had put horror behind her and would not anticipate tomorrow's strain. Only this moment existed for her—among friends, in a quiet sunset, with shadows marching up the peaks, and the wind blowing a little spray from the creek to her cheeks. "Not the slightest bit," she told them serenely. "You're quite right—I'm a widow now and it has all been incredibly dreadful. I'll sleep quite sound tonight, and no bad dreams."

"You're a useful wench to take along," Irv acknowledged. "You must be damn' near as sound a wench as J. Edgar Hoover here told me you were, by telephone. I guess the *Globe* can turn up a picture of you somewhere. But I could use a photographer for our college boy. . . . Any agency got pictures of you, son? Something in spats from Washington? Or something with a great big football letter on it?"

"What do you want pictures of me for?"

"I'm learnin' how to be a reporter. Charlie Pond, he's downright encouraging about my future in the business. In fact," Irv said, "if you think there's any better newspaperman in the United States, except maybe Charlie, you glance at tomorrow's *Globe*. You make the stories, I write 'em."

"Irv is suggesting something that doesn't seem to have dawned on you," Marta said. "He means he's written you into the story."

"When there's a touchdown pass on the last play of the game, I use it. . . . I always thought of you as a kind of armchair essayist, son, one of those bright boys in a wing collar that's too refined for the newspaper business. I didn't realize you'd been a four-letter man at college. I've got you down as the man who foresaw, unsleeping watchman while the careless nation drowsed. Seems you broke the plot, too. You marched three times round the city, blowin' on your ram's horn. Singlehanded, you marched into the jaws of death and brought treason crashin' to the earth in flame and gunfire."

"I hope you got in Barney rousing the law in time to gallop up in a cloud of sheriffs."

"Don't snoot the cops, son. It sure as hell felt comfortable to have 'em playin' in our backfield for once. . . . Furthermore," Irv drawled, "I didn't say a word to our net paid circulation to suggest you might be loaded down with horseshoes. I never told 'em that every time one of your great thoughts tripped you up, you fell face down in a patch of four-leaf clovers. The *Globe* says you're a wildcat with a college education and we'll want to contract for your diary. We'll even write it."

"Yes, we got the luck." Scott looked at Irv, who had begun to look languid and melancholy again; at Ann, a pleasant girl at any time and now radiantly content with Irv; at Marta, whose serenity was a flat denial of everything that had happened. "When those

ambulances started up the hill, only one of your four-leaf clovers kept any of us outside them."

Irv grunted. "Be a shame if Damon decides to die. I yearn to cover his trial for our net paid." He closed his eyes and guffawed. "Must of been quite a moment, back there at the house, when he saw you and realized that the amateurs had turned out to be fairly serious after all."

Quite a moment. There had been a number of moments. Also a number of moments had not occurred and now never would occur. "So Penfield won't walk down the Senate aisle on a colleague's arm and raise his hand and take an oath to support the Constitution that never had Taylor Damon's approval," Scott said slowly. "And President Penfield won't ride down Pennsylvania Avenue between massed ranks of saluting troops. There's a story you'll never have to write."

"Somebody'll fix it so I'll have to write others." Irv stood up and held out his hand. "So long. See you tomorrow. Or anyway in three weeks, when they line up the underlings."

"Why, Irv!" Marta protested. "You aren't staying here tonight?" "Ann promised the United States she'd get its Jap back on time. He didn't do us any good but he'll look nice at the trial. I couldn't let her travel alone with a patriot, could I?"

"He means it's a long drive and I like to hear him talk," Ann said. She took Marta's hand. "I'm sorry for all the things I thought about you. I hope—I hope you get the breaks from now on."

"You're getting married, aren't you?" Marta said, and when the girl nodded, took her in her arms.

"If Ann ain't laughing, you don't need to think it's funny," Irv admonished them. "Bend over and let Scott kiss you too, honey. . . . There ain't been time to work out any arrangements, but maybe all four of us better have a reunion dinner."

"At Stein's," Scott said. "He'll provide champagne."

Marta said, "Some people who ought to attend that reunion won't be able to. Bert Hagen, for one. And there's"—her voice faltered—"there's Jim Gislason."

"Or the wildcat's apartment in Washington—you get to like Washington eventually." Irv put an arm round Ann's shoulders. "Let's find the government's Jap and get started. . . . Look here, son, how much of your thinkin' have I still got to do? You're a celebrity now. The spotlight of the Press is goin' to focus on you and you got to live in the merciless glare of publicity. Maybe you two celebrities ought to take just so much of it and then disappear. Get the hell somewhere incognito. With a little practice both of you could get used to an alias. . . . So long, son. So long, Marta."

Marta stood at the railing, watching them go. A motor-car horn sounded and she waved. Sunset had darkened and the blue shadows among the pines were fading to dusk. She had been wearing a maid's uniform when he first saw her, and since then she had somehow found

time to put on a maid's summer dress. . . . Behind her were years of horror. Ahead of her was a time certain to be almost as bad. Tomorrow her family would arrive, portions of the Penfield clan would arrive, the Press would arrive in droves. There would break over her a hurricane of sensationalism which would not abate while any newspaper thought that any curiosity anywhere remained unfed. But, silhouetted against the crimson sky, she showed no dread or repulsion. She was just waving good-bye to some friends.

"Is it to be Washington, then?" she asked. She turned away from the railing. "I don't know any of the unessential things about you, Scott." She caught the implications of his gaze. Her breast rose, colour deepened in her cheeks, and her head went back. "I couldn't find a single garment of the leader of fashion anywhere in the house," she said. "If I'm going to bewilder you and storm your senses and drown your judgment altogether—it's got to be in this little green print from Auburn. Am I comely, Scott? Am I desirable in your eyes? . . . No, you idiot! Don't try to stand up."

He whispered, against her cheek, "To make any garment distracting, simply put it on. Green print from Auburn, yellow cotton from Hitchcock, green outing suit from Bemidji, blue night-gown from Minot—they drowned my judgment long ago. They'll storm me into marrying you within a month."

"Positively on fire and out of hand, aren't you, and such a cheap little green print dress," she murmured. She sat up, out of his arms. "I know what's in your mind, I've learned you all too thoroughly. Delicacy is always getting in your way and you can't marry me tomorrow because my soul must be numb with horror—give me time to forget my anguish! My soul is coarser than you think." She pointed to a gable of the lodge, seen through an opening in the pines. "I ran into that room and found him leaning over Dixon Gale, with a gun in his hand." She shrugged a shoulder in the direction of the flat. "I sprawled on the ground and saw him raise his gun and shoot Taylor Damon. I saw him crumple on the ground. And all my soul feels is, Thank God he's dead. This afternoon didn't make me a widow, my dear. I've been a widow for three years. As I tried to tell you immodestly once, I hadn't been a wife for two years before that. Why can't you end the widowhood tomorrow?"

He started to say, "You're so damned rich—" but she broke in scornfully. "That's a silly kind of lie, darling. Besides, this isn't his palace, it's his family's, and it won't be mine. And I won't sleep in it after tonight—I wouldn't spend tonight here if they'd let us go. Tell the truth, Scott. What oddity of righteousness makes you hold the widow at arm's length?"

"You heard Irv. From nine o'clock tomorrow millions of candle-power will be focused on you. Could I possibly ask you to add a crowning sensation by marrying me while the whole world looks on?"

"When I try to get away from you, I can't. When I try to marry you, I can't." A hopeful expression came to her face. "Have you

considered my good name, Scott! All those newspapers will print maps of our tour. Some nights they won't be able to account for, of course. But there'll be a cross at Minot, and maybe a picture of that tourist camp. Clearly our sleeping-bags are scandalous—side by side in the bushes, no doubt. And we certainly stayed at the Hitchcock Hotel, and you drove me across a good many state lines. Think of my soul with the whole world pointing a finger at me, Scott. Are you a cad, darling, or are you——”

He said, hoarsely, “I wake up in Hitchcock—and you're gone. I start to Sacramento—and Penfield has kidnapped you. I get to Reno—and the worst has happened to you. I come to in a mountain cabin with a few hours to live—and you must be dead. I see you dragged across a patch of sun—and there's a gun in his hand. Good lord, Marta, pictures like that have got to fade——”

She lay back against his shoulder. “I have some pictures too. If you thought daringly and to the point you'd find a way to make them fade.”

“Mostly I see you standing at a camp fire in Montana. I'd hauled you away from one murder and into another one. I was driving you straight towards the ordeal you're in for tomorrow. And there you were with the firelight on you and I was falling in love with you. It was insanity—and there it was.”

“There is plenty of wood here, there are sticks to build fires of at Silvertip,” she whispered.

“Too much strain, too many sensations—it wouldn't be right. You're bound to long for quiet, you've got to be hidden and at peace for a while.”

“Well, I can't force you to marry me. But watch out, Scott,” she said dangerously. “I told you I won't sleep in the lodge even tonight. I'll be in the house right next door. You're crippled, of course. But you'd better have your righteousness on guard against my coarse soul, darling, for I'm not crippled, I'm sound of limb——”

Heavy footsteps sounded in the room off the porch, designedly heavy. Sheriff Updike of Placer County stamped about some more before coming out on the porch. The sheriff was embarrassed, and not by seeing a woman sitting in the circle of a man's arms, either. “That damn attorney! He left this one to me—maybe he'll want you to vote for him sometime. So he gets the hell out of here and drops this in my lap. It's my baby, he says—and my fingers burned nine ways already and more to come tomorrow. You get your lawyers to work on it. And remember it ain't no fault of mine.”

“What is it this time, Steve?” Scott asked.

“More damned nonsense—a big package of horse feathers. It don't make sense. We got this Berg, we got a confession, everything is strictly okay, but Wisconsin has got warrants out for George Cook and Marie Royce. The prosecutor, he says we got to take account of them till they're vacated. Probably I got to hold you both. I ask you, is that common sense and honest law, or is it horse feathers?”

"This afternoon has made being wanted for murder so trivial that I'd forgotten it."

"Horse feathers and nothing else. California won't issue extradition papers—we know about you. But your lawyer has to put on a straight face and get up and talk like a lawyer. Yeah, and if I arrest you, I can say you're in custody right here."

"There you are," Marta said with satisfaction. "I'll have to stay here more than tonight. So will you. That's being hidden and keeping quiet. Does it alter your manly decision?"

But light was beginning to break in Scott's mind and he was thinking fast. "No," he said, "we'll take the rap." Marta and the sheriff looked at him, startled. "It's up to you, isn't it, Steve? The county attorney won't mind you handling it any way you want? If you think it's horse feathers, you can act accordingly."

"If it's my baby, I can damn' well dress it any way I like."

"And knowing our purity of soul you could, well, parole us?"

"Just as long as you're in Auburn three weeks from now when they arraign those birds and you start swearin' them into the pen."

"Three weeks is just exactly right. . . . Just about the time Mrs. Penfield gets fed up with Press and relatives tomorrow—well, if you decided to arrest Marie Royce right then, you could?" The sheriff nodded. "It might be a trifle irregular, even eccentric, to deputize Scott Warner and direct him to deliver George Cook and Marie Royce at Fond du Lac, say two weeks from now. It would be at my expense and you'd be saving the State of Wisconsin money and meanwhile our lawyers would get to work on those warrants. But you could give us a start—snatch us from the Press, hold us incommunicado, as the Press will certainly put it, and put us on a plane for Hitchcock."

Steve Updike began to grin. "That's a bouquet of horse feathers too. But if anybody says a word, I got that confession. I might want you to vote for me sometime. Anyways I could put her in your custody and get you on a 'plane."

Marta's face lighted with comprehension. "Our car is at Hitchcock still. . . . Up on the mountain—while we were still desperate—you said, if you could only get in a car and start out to drive me a thousand miles! It's a good deal more than that from Hitchcock to Petit Marais. And no one can find us while we're driving it—at least no one ever did."

"Irv saw it first—that's what he meant by going incognito."

"But are you marrying me here or at Hitchcock? Mr. Updike, what do we need to be legal, and no horse feathers?"

"Just a licence and somebody to read the words, ma'am."

"Where do we get them?"

"Auburn."

"Can we get them tonight?"

Shocked, "Not unless you got more pull with the county clerk than I have. Folks that can't wait generally go down to Nevada. Maybe the prosecutor could fix it up for you tomorrow."

"But, anyway, you put me in the custody of Mr. Warner? And that makes you responsible to the courts of California, darling."

Sheriff Updike made less noise, getting out. Marta watched him disappear into the advancing dusk. "How far is it from Hitchcock to Petit Marais?"

"About two weeks and a half. Do you want to travel it, Marta, and did I work that one out satisfactorily?"

"I want to travel it, Scott. All those miles and no one in pursuit. You always think things out right in the end—or almost right." Her eyes measured something in the dusk. "That's for tomorrow, of course. . . . It's such a little way from house to house. . . . I'm sound of limb, my dear, and in your custody."

THE END

